

ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

**SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING, MEANING
AND WORK PERFORMANCE:
NARRATIVES OF
HEALTHCARE SALES REPRESENTATIVES
IN MALAYSIA**

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requirements of Anglia Ruskin University
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**ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY
ABSTRACT**

LORD ASHCROFT INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS SCHOOL

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

**SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING, MEANING AND WORK PERFORMANCE:
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This research focuses on spiritual well-being in the workplace and its relation to work performance. Extant empirical studies have mostly focused on demonstrating statistical links between these two concepts to the exclusion of qualitative studies that can better explain what spiritual well-being may be and how the experience is possibly related to work performance. Especially under-researched is the ground-level employees' perspectives and the possible incompatibility of spiritual and organisational goals. This research thus examined the experiences of spiritual well-being among successful healthcare sales representatives in Malaysia, particularly on how their spiritual inclinations or their inclination for meaningfulness interfaced with the need to meet work targets.

This qualitative research is exploratory and is framed within a constructionist epistemological stance. It used narrative inquiry as its methodology. Its primary data were stories successful healthcare sales representatives in Malaysia told about their work. These were collected and analysed using narrative interviews and narrative analysis respectively.

What the research found was that the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance was depicted to be diverse, fragile and transitory. This was predicated on the ground-level employees' experience of the interface between their spiritual inclinations and the need to meet work targets, which was diverse and changeable. What the research also found was that spiritual well-being resembled an experience that was constructed as employees engaged with their work. Spiritual well-being is thus neither merely found at work nor merely brought to work but constructed in the interplay between the employees' spiritual inclinations and what they do at work.

The research contributes to theoretical development in the area by advancing an expanded understanding of spirituality in the workplace. It demonstrates that spiritual well-being is contingent upon the work employees do, and the extent to which the work may be amenable for the construction of the experience. Thus, the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance ought to be understood from the way individual employees construct and individualise their experience of work. The research also foregrounds the importance of using models of organisation that accommodate the constructed, interactive and evolving nature of spiritual well-being in the workplace.

Keywords: Spiritual well-being, spiritual inclinations, meaning, work performance, work targets, ground-level employees, narrative inquiry, stories.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

This research, being about spiritual well-being and spirituality in the workplace, is, by its nature, about people and deeper questions about the meaning of work. It is about the experience of notions of authenticity, connection, values and growth and their significance for people in the domain of work. As such, the research is about recognising and examining the employee's spiritual inclinations or what they may be inclined towards with regard to, for instance, the difference they make by what they do, the larger purpose enacted through their work and the compatibility of what they do with what they believe to be worthwhile endeavours. By the same token, this research is also about recognising and examining what employees may be spiritually disinclined towards – meaninglessness, inauthenticity and the absence of connection, values and growth in the workplace – and perhaps even their tolerance for such experiences.

This research is also about work performance. Specifically, it investigates the possible relations between spiritual well-being and work performance by examining the significance of experiences of spiritual inclinations among employees who demonstrate excellence and success in practice. Hence, this research resides within organisational research and is broadly about people and performance.

This chapter introduces the reader to the thesis. It locates the research in the larger organisational field and provides a summary of the rationale for it. It also describes and explains the key decisions and general processes undertaken in the research as well as furnishes the reader with a brief autobiographical account of my experience of work in relation to the topic. The chapter ends with an outline of the thesis.

1.1 Research background

The study of spirituality in the workplace is diverse and spans many specific organisational areas such as leadership (e.g. Chaston and Lips-Wiersma, 2014; Fairholm, 2011; Fry, 2003; Krishnakumar et al., 2014; Reave, 2005; Robinson and Smith, 2014), ethics (e.g. Furnham, 2003; McGhee and Grant, 2008; Pruzan et al., 2007; Zsolnai, 2011), entrepreneurship (e.g. Jackson and Konz, 2006; King-Kauanui et al., 2005) and organisational transformation and development (e.g. Benefiel, 2005; Cacioppe, 2000;

Dehler and Welsh, 1994; Neal et al., 1999), though a substantial portion of the literature is connected to issues regarding the management of human resources (e.g. Fry et al., 2011; Val Kinjerski and Skrypnek, 2008; Lips-Wiersma and Morris, 2009; Pfeffer, 2003; Saks, 2011).

In many ways, the area of spirituality in the workplace shares the common view in organisational research and practice that people are an important organisational resource (Butts, 1999; Knights and Wilmott, 2007; Manuti and Davide de palma, 2014; Pfeffer and Sutton, 2006) and that there are benefits from valuing employees and their humanness (Bolton, 2010; Kinjerski and Skrypnek, 2006; Lewin and Regine, 2001). Notable organisational theorists argue that a workplace that ‘humanises’ rather than one that ‘dehumanises’ is more likely to effectively tap into human resources which, in turn, would be instrumental to optimal organisational performance.

For instance, Drucker (1995) proposes that effective management is about understanding people, who they are, what motivates them and what they value and believe in. In ‘The Human Side of Enterprise’, McGregor (1985) prompted organisational scholars and practitioners to question assumptions that people need to be directed and controlled; instead, he proposed an alternative theory, based on Maslow’s theory of the hierarchy of needs, that assumes people to be self-directed, self-motivated and to seek responsibilities, achievements, growth and self-actualization. These assertions, though not new, are still being investigated today, buoyed perhaps by supporting empirical evidence¹. These arguments represent some of the ideas underpinning this research’s interest in people, specifically the idea of spiritual well-being in the workplace and its relation to work performance.

¹ For example, Peters and Waterman Jr. (2003) conclude from their 1982 study about the best-run companies in America that success depended upon whether organisations create an environment where their employees can flourish. “In short, we found the obvious, that the individual human being still counts” (Peters and Waterman Jr., 2003, p.8). Lewin and Regine (2001) came to a similar conclusion. Drawing their sample of successful organisations in the United Kingdom and the United States of America, the authors found that the companies in their study “are all successful in the traditional bottom-line terms, not *despite* being human-oriented, but rather, as many of the CEOs [the authors] talked with argue, *because* of it” (p.13). Senge (2006) also concur. His observations are that competitive and successful organisations tend to conduct their work “in both pragmatic and human terms” (Senge, 2006, pp. 272-273).

The common assumption held by scholars and practitioners in the area is that people have a spiritual dimension in addition to their physical, mental and emotional dimensions (Barrett, 2009; Benefiel, 2005b), though there are conceptual ambiguities that emerge from this compartmentalised view of human beings. Nevertheless, one of the foundational ideas of spirituality in the workplace research is the recognition of a person's inclination to more fully be himself or herself at work (Kinjerski and Skrypnek, 2004; Mitroff et al., 2009). If so, it is unlikely that the working person can confine his or her spiritual inclinations entirely to life's non-working moments, at least not for an extended period of time. The worker, according to Csikszentmihalyi (2004), Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003) and Pfeffer (2003), needs opportunities for spiritual nourishment while at work. In fact, Moore (2008) suggests that problems at work can be dealt with effectively if organisations consider the entire human person of their workers, including the spiritual dimension.

1.1.1 Rationale for focusing on spiritual well-being in the workplace

From his interview with ordinary people about the work they do in the early 1970s, Terkel (1985) found that the nature of work can cause immense damage to a person's spirit. He also found the opposite, though less frequently, that some people find their work immensely meaningful. As such, Terkel (1985) concluded that work is about searching "for daily meaning as well as daily bread, for recognition as well as cash, for astonishment rather than torpor; in short, for a sort of life rather than a Monday to Friday sort of dying" (p. xiii).

Despite the contextual disparities between work then and today, it is perhaps this appeal, i.e. the possibility of finding 'daily meaning' alongside the requisite search for 'daily bread', that prompts the interest in spirituality in the workplace research and sustains it. This interest is perhaps fuelled further by the perception that employees are generally disenchanted at work. According to Gallup's 'State of the Global Workplace' report conducted in 142 countries from 2011 to 2012, only 13 per cent of the employees sampled were categorised as 'engaged' while the other massive 87 per cent were either 'actively disengaged' or 'not engaged' (Crabtree, 2013).

Various reasons have been supplied as to the need for studying spirituality in the workplace. According to Cartwright and Holmes (2006), changes in the nature of work,

such as the increase in demands at work without an adequate consideration of its negative effects on employees, have led to cynicism and distrust towards organisations and their leaders. The authors argue that the employment contract in recent years has shifted from “employees offering loyalty, trust and commitment in exchange for job security, training and development, promotion and support from their employers” (p. 200) to one of a purely transactional nature – money in exchange for their efforts – and the marked absence of loyalty, trust and commitment from either side (Cartwright and Holmes, 2006). This is but a sample of many others in the area that advocate meaningfulness and spiritual well-being in the workplace as promising ideas that can restore motivation and combat the dispiriting work environment.

Other reasons for the focus on spiritual well-being in the workplace include the possibility of a generational shift in values such as the “increase concern for quality-of-life, self-expression, [and] sense of community” (Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003, p. 15) and greater emphasis on higher needs² since lower needs are satiated (Hoffman, 2003; Zohar and Marshall, 2004). These are perhaps also precipitated by the dwindling traditional avenues for people to contribute and connect, such as places of worship and local neighbourhood communities (Ashmos and Duchon, 2000; Conger, 1994), and the ubiquity of work or employment for many people (Baldry et al., 2007). Furthermore, the work people do, Csikszentmihalyi (2004) suggests, have the potential to define who they are. As such, the domain of work and the workplace may be transforming into an important context for human engagement and living for a growing segment of the working population.

However, pursuing spirituality in the workplace ideas in research poses several challenges, not least for its idiosyncratic and intangible quality. Robinson and Smith (2014), for instance, highlight the incommensurable ways some studies in the area approach the subject and raise the prospects of negative implications for organisations that engage with practices that foster spiritual well-being (see also Section 2.4 for criticisms of research in the area). But this does not mean that ideas surrounding the concept of spirituality in the workplace should be abandoned altogether. It may still represent an important concept for research to pursue if organisations aspire to better understand and engage their workforce. Thus, this research joins other studies in the area in assessing spirituality and spiritual well-being as offering complementary ideas to organizing, managing and leading. In so doing, this research views its endeavour, not as a panacea to the ills of poor work performance,

² In reference to Maslow’s (1999) theory of the Hierarchy of Needs.

but as an exploration of ways organisations and their employees may be able to navigate the need to satisfy both spiritual and work goals simultaneously.

1.1.2 Rationale for focusing on work performance

The implicit, if not explicit, focus of a considerable portion of organisational research and practice can be said to relate to work performance. The study of leadership, work motivation, management systems, policies or practices generally pivot around the concern for efficiency and productivity at work. Studies in the area of spirituality in the workplace show similar interests.

There are studies in the area that specifically attempt to establish statistical links between spiritual well-being and some measure of work performance (see for e.g. Fry et al., 2011; Milliman et al., 2003; Petchsawang and Duchon, 2009; Rego and Cunha, 2008). Others use a qualitative approach to substantiate the link (see for e.g. Csikszentmihalyi, 2004; Kinjerski and Skrypnek, 2008; Lewin and Regine, 2001). On the whole, studies suggest that spiritual well-being has a positive effect on work performance. But despite dedicated attempts to study the link, there is neither the volume nor depth of empirical studies examining *how* spiritual well-being and work performance may be related.

1.1.3 Knowledge gaps

There are significant gaps in the current study of spiritual well-being and its relation to work performance. Firstly, there is still much ambiguity in the way spirituality in the workplace is defined. This, in turn, complicates the progress of knowledge of what spiritual well-being may be and its significance for the workplace. Secondly, the current discourse seems to privilege the perspectives and interest of organisations and of their leaders over the perspectives of ground-level employees. Ground-level employees are defined as employees with non-leadership roles within the organisations; they occupy the basic rung in the organisational hierarchy. Their perspectives could add to knowledge in the area since current empirical studies rarely, and in a comprehensive manner, include their voices.

Thirdly, the emphasis on the potential benefits of spiritual well-being in the workplace dominates the discourse to the point that potential disadvantages, in the main, remain unexamined. This includes the possible incompatibility between the employees' spiritual inclinations and organisational goals. For instance, Ashforth and Pratt (2003) suggest that, "(o)rganizational priorities trump individual ones...spirituality is often less salient than the urgent press of concrete and pragmatic [organisational] concerns" (p.46). Hoffman (2010) concurs and suggests that organisations' and employees' values can be acutely divergent because organisations serve their own rather than their employees' interests first. So, a critical aspect for studies in the area is in understanding the intersection between employees' spiritual inclinations and the work prescribed for them, including the extents to which they align or conflict.

Fourthly, there is an inadequate recognition of the influence of local work contexts on spiritual well-being and on its relation with work performance. Despite some empirical work in government service (Pattakos, 2004), healthcare (Kinjerski and Skrypnek, 2008) and military (Fry et al., 2011, 2005), studies in the area rarely account for the locally- and contextually-situated experiences of work. This hampers theoretical development in the area and weakens theoretical arguments regarding the frequently posited positive relation between spiritual well-being and work performance.

1.2 Research questions

This research addresses the gaps in knowledge noted above. The purpose of this research is to understand the possible relations between spiritual well-being in the workplace and work performance. It also seeks to understand the ground-level employees' experience of work, specifically how spiritual inclinations and the need to deliver on work targets interface. In essence, the research is about the meeting and interaction, at the personal level, of two forces in the domain of work: spiritual inclinations, or the inclination for meaningfulness³, which are mostly self-imposed, and work targets, which are mostly organisationally-imposed.

³ From the synthesis of the literature, the notion of 'meaning' was found to be central to 'spirituality in the workplace'. As such, the notion of 'meaning' was used as conceptual *shorthand* for the larger concept of 'spirituality in the workplace'. Also, the term 'meaning' is used to denote *spiritual* meaning rather than any and all kinds of meaning. See Section 3.1 for a more elaborate argument.

The central research questions are:

- 1) In the ground-level employee's experience, what is the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance?
- 2) In the ground-level employee's experience, how does the inclination for meaningfulness and the need to deliver work targets interface?

My ancillary research questions, with regard to the ground-level employee's experience of work, are:

- 1) How does the inclination for meaningfulness influence the need to deliver work targets?
- 2) How does the need to deliver work targets influence the inclination for meaningfulness?
- 3) How is the interface between the inclination for meaningfulness and the need to deliver work targets influenced by work contexts and work features?

1.3 Methodology

Qualitative research was selected to facilitate the search for answers to the research questions. The methodology used by this research is narrative inquiry, which views the stories participants tell as representations of their experiences. The corresponding method of data collection and data analysis was narrative interview and narrative analysis respectively. The narrative interview method enabled the research to elicit an elaboration of the experiences participants considered significant to them at work while narrative analysis offered a philosophically-consistent way to analyse their stories of work.

The site chosen for this research was the healthcare sales industry in Malaysia, specifically the experiences of Malaysian healthcare sales representatives that consistently achieve their sales targets. The healthcare sales industry supplied the conditions of work that assisted this research's focus on spiritual well-being and its relation to work performance; by and large, the 'healthcare part' of the healthcare sales representative's work provided contexts that facilitated stories of their spiritual inclinations and for meaningfulness at work while the 'sales part' provided contexts that facilitated stories about their work

targets. Additionally, healthcare sales representatives in Malaysia are more apt to be regarded as ground-level employees rather than as leaders within the organisational structure.

1.4 Research process

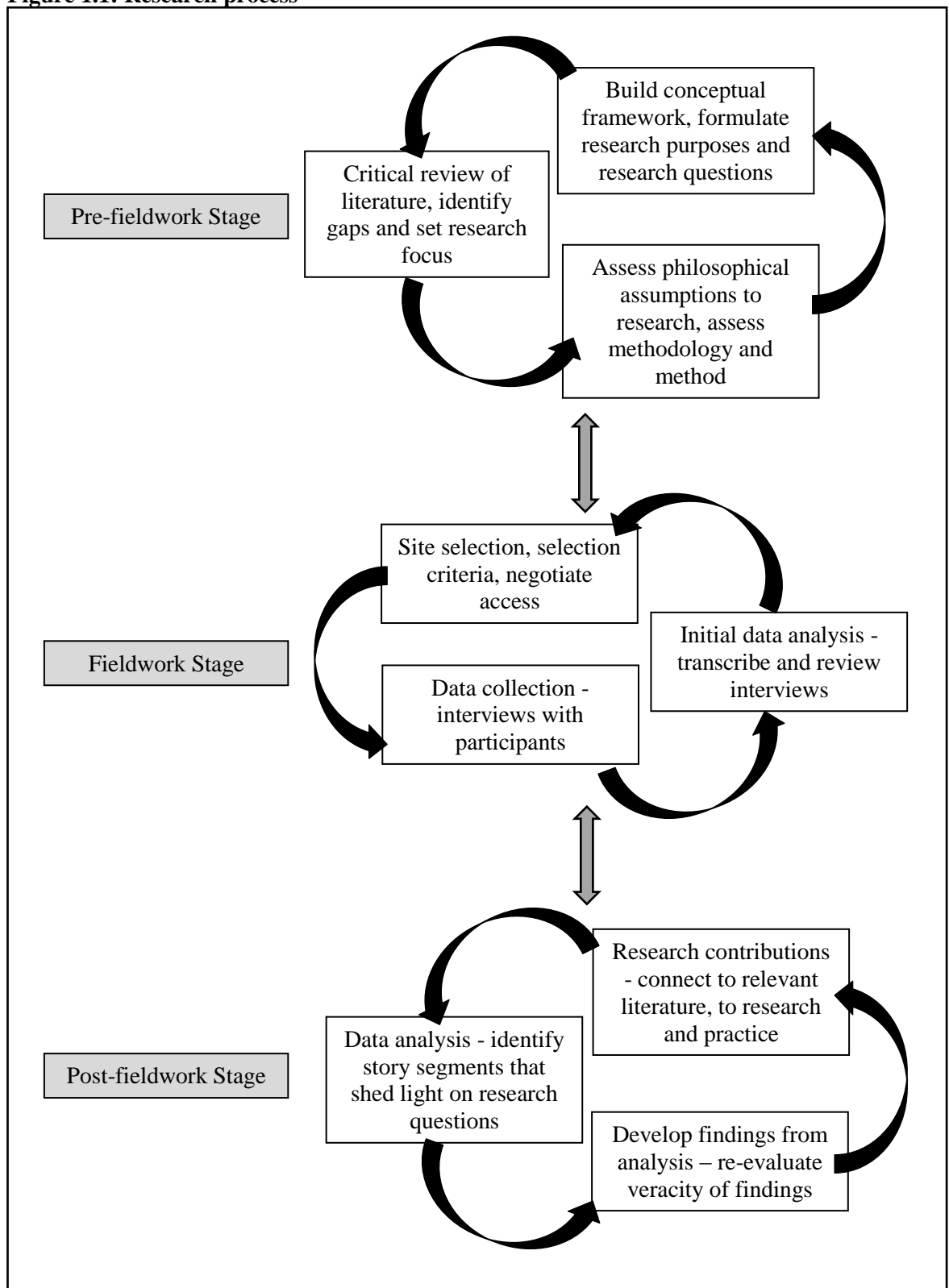
A flowchart depicting the research process is presented in this section. It gives the readers an overview of the basic organisation of the research. The flowchart focuses on the main steps and explains the general sequence undertaken. According to Maxwell (2005), the design of qualitative research is iterative and involves a considerable amount of moving “back and forth between the different components of the research design, assessing the implications of goals, theories, research questions, methods and validity threats for one another” (p.3). The process this research underwent depicts a similar iteration within and between each of the three main stages (see Figure 1.1) and as such reflects its qualitative research design.

The Pre-fieldwork Stage consisted of the synthesis of the literature on the topic as well as the assessment of possible methodologies and methods for the research. This stage also involved the constant and substantial revision of what were then the working conceptual framework and research questions. The Fieldwork Stage came next. Although considerably more straightforward than the earlier stage, adjustments to the selection criteria had to be made in order to assist in improving the research’s access to potential participants. The frequency and intensity of the iterative process resumed during the Post-fieldwork Stage, a result of constantly checking the interpretations of the raw data and inferences that led to the research findings and contributions.

1.5 Researcher background

The choice of topic for this research reflects my own experience of work. I was under employment for 13 years prior to embarking on this PhD journey. Except for a six-month stint as a safety officer in the manufacturing industry, also my first job, I had spent my entire career in the healthcare sales industry in Malaysia.

Figure 1.1: Research process



As a sales representative in this industry, I had generally performed well, having met my sales targets for five consecutive years at one point. The main reason I felt I did so well was because I found the work spiritually rewarding in some respects. Some of the products

I sold and the services I provided contributed to improved patient outcomes, sometimes to a significant degree⁴. I thus pursued the work with fervor; it resonated with my values and beliefs, gave me deep satisfaction and a sense of being able to contribute to a worthwhile cause. The job was also financially rewarding, especially when my sales targets were met.

During the latter part of my career in healthcare sales, things changed. Sales targets took on greater emphasis at work; I had also moved from one multinational pharmaceutical sales company to a local entrepreneurial start-up, and after that, to a multinational medical device sales company. Although the nature of the work remained the same throughout, the work meant very different things to me; I promoted different products and services for different therapeutic areas, engaged with different categories of healthcare professionals and was exposed to different work (organisational) cultures. Along with these changes, the sense of contribution I had experienced earlier ebbed and flowed. As a sales manager then, I was also unsure how to use what I had experienced earlier to manage for increased performance in what I thought was a humanistic way.

It was then that I, while pursuing a Master's degree in Business Administration (MBA), chanced upon the research area of spirituality in the workplace. What I read about it then corresponded to the issues I was grappling with at work. After completing my MBA final year project (an empirical study) on the subject, I recall wanting to further my research into the area. This PhD thesis is the outcome of my continued personal and professional interest in the subject. In a way, the thesis is also a reflection of my experience of work as well as my introspection and narratives about them.

1.6 Thesis outline

Chapter 1 sets out the background of the research as well as the broader rationale underpinning the research. It also notes the relevant gaps and challenges posed to the research. After stating the research purposes and research questions, the chapter briefly explains the researcher's choice of methodology and methods. Next, it makes explicit the general process undertaken in this research and describes the researcher's background in relation to the subject. The thesis outline, as with this section, ends the chapter.

⁴ I had promoted pharmaceutical drugs for schizophrenia and depression, and marketed medical devices to help treat recalcitrant wounds and sepsis. I also had the good fortune of witnessing how some patients' condition improved dramatically while being treated with these drugs and devices.

Chapter 2 is the critique of relevant literature. The first part of the chapter examines the literature for definitions of spirituality in the workplace and, by extension, scopes what spiritual well-being may be. This represents an attempt to make sense of the diverse and sometimes obscure meaning of the term 'spirituality' or 'spiritual', within organisational studies specifically and within related scholarly work generally. The second part of the chapter scrutinizes the theoretical arguments and evidence of the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance in extant organisational literature. Chapter 2 thus represents the synthesis of current knowledge in preparation for empirical investigation.

Chapter 3 begins with a critical look at the gaps in knowledge identified from the critique of the literature in Chapter 2. It also explains how the conceptual framework was designed before relating to and stating the research purposes and research questions. After that, the rationale for selecting the healthcare sales industry and the country of Malaysia as the research sites are presented, followed by additional critique of literature specific to these sites. The chapter ends with a description of the healthcare sales industry in Malaysia, including aspects of the healthcare sales representative's work, its contexts and features. This final portion of the chapter provides the reader with background knowledge about the participants' work and prepares the reader to understand their excerpted stories in Chapters 5 and 6.

Chapter 4 relates to the research methodology. It has three main parts. The first part is the examination of the philosophical underpinnings of the research which helps link the researcher's epistemological (and ontological) assumptions to the research methods, followed by an examination of issues relating to validity and ethics. The second part focuses on field work issues, such as sampling, access and the research interviews. The third part is the rationale behind the analysis and includes a reconfiguration of what constituted a story for the analysis.

Chapters 5 and 6 are the analysis and findings chapters. Chapter 5 begins with an introduction of the participants. Subsequently, I present the analyses of selected participant stories based on initial general impressions regarding the possible ways participants, their inclination for meaningfulness, and their need to meet work targets interfaced. The analysis and findings in Chapter 5 sheds light on the main research questions. However, they also indicated a need for exploring in greater depth how participants come to experience work as satisfying their spiritual inclinations, which is the focus of the analysis in Chapter 6.

Chapter 7, the final chapter, presents the research's contributions and conclusions. It starts with an assessment of the limitations of the research. After that, it elaborates on the research's contributions to knowledge and examines the possible implications the findings and contributions have for research and practice. It concludes the thesis thereafter.

Chapter 2 Spiritual well-being and work performance

This chapter has two main parts. The first part relates to the definitions of spiritual well-being. It attempts to explore the literature in order to sufficiently grasp the concept for this research. In the second part, suggestions, evidence and theoretical arguments in the literature for the possible relations between spiritual well-being and work performance are examined. To end, specific criticisms of the area relevant to the research are highlighted.

2.1 Spiritual well-being – a definition

It is common for organisational researchers in the area use terms such as ‘spirituality in the workplace’, ‘spirit at work’ and ‘spirituality’ to refer to the concept under investigation. Despite coming across neutral, their use of these terms usually connotes a sense of well-being that comes from meeting one’s spiritual needs, i.e. spiritual well-being, in the domain of work. This can be observed from the verbatim of some of literature cited in this review. So, in order to examine what spiritual well-being may mean, the following review includes literature that use the above-mentioned terms as they are clearly related to this research. Aside from reflecting the preference of terms by researchers in the area, ‘spirituality in the workplace’ will be used in this thesis to refer to the research area and the concept of spirituality in the sphere of work. Alternatively, the term ‘spiritual well-being’ will be used to refer specifically to this research’s focus.

One of the ways to begin understanding the concept of spiritual well-being is perhaps to consider the origin of the word *spirit*. According to ‘An Etymological Dictionary of Modern English’ (Weekley, 1921), the word *spirit* is derived from the Latin word *spiritus*, meaning *to breathe*. In a sense then, the original meaning of the word *spirit* can be taken to mean “the life force” (Neal, 2004, p.462) or that which gives life. Another useful way to understand the concept is to consider what the terms *spirit* or *spiritual* are contrasted with. Within organisational discourse, the meaning of the term *spiritual* is occasionally contrasted with the *material*, generally in reference to materialistic pursuits or the tangible and concrete (see for e.g. Kasser, 2011; Gull and Doh, 2004; Tischler et al. 2002).

In Ottaway's (2003) view, the breadth of the interpretation of the term spiritual or spirituality is evident in modern theological writing on the subject, such as in Fox (1981)

and Volf (2001), right through to modern business writing, such as in Renesch (1992) and Chappell (1993). The breadth of the interpretation of the concept often also seems to be accompanied by a certain amount of ambiguity. Some scholars, e.g. Brown (2003) and Polley et al. (2005), consider this definitional, and by extension conceptual, diversity and ambiguity potentially confusing while others, e.g. van Tonder and Ramdass (2009) and Kinjerski and Skrypnek (2004), seek empirical clarification for it.

However, the lack of a clear definition and a consensus is not exceptional to spirituality in the workplace research. Citing Stodgill (1974) and Schein (1992), Dent et al. (2005) argue that 'leadership' and 'culture' researchers experience similar definitional difficulties. As such, definitional ambiguities and discordances, Mohamad et al. (2004) argue, reflect the early phase of research of the topic. These writers perhaps imply that definitional consensus is achievable, imminent and preferable. Others, however, offer contrasting views. For instance, Rego and Cunha (2008) suggest that the definitional diversity can be attributed to the strong personal nature of the concept, that perhaps spirituality in the workplace may not mean the same thing to every person. If this is true, attempts to achieve a consensus on what the concept means may neither be imminent nor preferable.

Correspondingly, Swinton and Pattison (2010) suggest that the ambiguous and imprecise manner in which spirituality is defined should be preserved. This, Swinton and Pattison (2010) argue, is because the multiplicity of definitions of the term helps to reflect the wide-range of contextual meanings people may associate with the concept. In this way, it is likely that precise definitions impose strict limits on a concept where imprecise definitions create space for, with the latter more amenable to concepts like spirituality or spiritual well-being in the workplace.

Although Swinton and Pattison's (2010) article examines the implications of the discourse of spirituality for practice, nursing practice in particular, their arguments seem to resonate with the purpose of generating knowledge in research. According to Mitroff, one of the pioneers in research in spirituality and religion in the workplace, definitions of concepts should function to guide rather than strangle inquiry (Dean, 2004). Similarly, Blumer (1954) (cited in Bryman and Bell, 2011) suggests that researchers use definitions that *sensitizes* rather than definitions that are *definitive* because the strategy caters to the varied ways concepts can be assumed to be in social research. The practical challenge for

researchers is to balance between neither defining a concept too broadly nor too narrowly, but sufficiently for the purpose of its investigation (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

Nonetheless, some researchers define spirituality in the workplace in precise terms, that is, as constituted by several specific components that they argue are central to the concept (see Fry, 2003; Petchsawang and Duchon, 2009). For instance, Ashmos and Duchon (2000) define spirituality in the workplace as “the recognition that employees have an inner life that nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work that takes place in the context of community” (p.137), where ‘inner life’, ‘meaningful work’ and ‘community’ represent the central components of their definition. However, the supposed ease of comprehension with the precision of these definitions may still be thwarted by the imprecise meaning inherent in some components used to define the concept. Even if definitions can be precise, the concept of spirituality in the workplace, according to Kinjerski and Skrypnek (2004), might be difficult to define in a comprehensive manner.

In view of these perspectives, the literature in the area are examined in order to infer from them common notions associated with the concept of spirituality in the workplace. This strategy represents a way for this research to grasp the concept to the extent that it facilitates the research’s aims while avoiding narrow definitions of the concept particularly in the early stages of the research. Based on my reading of the literature, I found five common notions of the concept of spirituality in the workplace. They are authenticity, meaning, connection, values and growth. Correspondingly, spiritual well-being within the domain of work is taken to specifically refer to the experience people relate to when their needs for these notions are met at work. I examine each of these notions in turn in the following sections.

2.1.1 Authenticity

One of the notions connected to the concept of spirituality in the workplace relates to the authenticity between the inner and outer self of the person, or in other words, being one’s true self at work (Ashar and Lane-Maher, 2004; Kinjerski and Skrypnek, 2004; Pfeffer, 2003; Pratt and Ashforth, 2003; van Tonder and Ramdass, 2009). This notion may be assumed to refer to the way “our actions are congruent with our inner values and beliefs” (Kinjerski and Skrypnek, 2004, p.32). Additionally, the notion of authenticity also relates

closely to the idea that people yearn to bring to or express their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual energies, hence their full selves, at work (Kinjerski and Skrypnek, 2004; Mitroff and Denton, 1999a). The premise for this notion perhaps lies with the assumption that it contradicts human nature to expect people to separate who they are from what they do at work (Pfeffer, 2003). Denying people the opportunity to live an integrated life at work thus, Pfeffer (2003) adds, devalues them and injures their spirit.

If the larger discourse on spirituality in the workplace points to “absences” (Swinton and Pattison, 2010, p.231), or to the lack of something, then references to the notion of authenticity within the literature perhaps foregrounds the absence of the ability of people to behave in ways that are consistent with their values and beliefs while pursuing work. The significance of wanting to be authentic or the significance of the absence of authenticity at work for employees can be observed in the way some research participants define spirituality in the workplace. For instance, van Tonder and Ramdass’ (2009) participants suggest that a central meaning of spirituality in the workplace is about “employees enacting their inner world and belief system, without hesitation” (p.6).

All in all, discussions relating to the notion of authenticity appear to relate to issues of identity and the honest expression of that identity while people engage with work. In this regard, Pratt and Ashforth's (2003) definition of spirituality in the workplace sheds more light on the notion. They propose holism and harmony to be one of the dimensions of spirituality in the workplace. Specifically, they describe holism as “an integration of the various aspects of oneself (e.g., identities, beliefs, traits) into a roughly coherent and consistent self” while harmony as “the sense that the integration of the various aspects is synergistic and informs one’s behaviour” (Pratt and Ashforth, 2003, p.93). Thus, the dimensions of holism and harmony highlight spirituality in the workplace as the unity and oneness of the person and his or her actions.

However, the ideas behind the notion of authenticity raise other questions for spirituality in the workplace research. For example, while people may be thus inclined to be their true selves, it seems less clear from the literature whether people aspire to be their true selves all the time and in every circumstance. Polley et al. (2005) argues that, unlike the assumptions made by a majority of studies in the area, not every employee is willing to engage with spiritual issues at work or have their deeply personal notions of spirituality challenged at work. This casts questions on whether the inclination for authenticity while

at work is perhaps only partial or perhaps even misconceived at times. Furthermore, the discussions about the authenticity between our inner and outer selves appear simplistic since they seem to imply that there are consistent, stable inner values and beliefs with which people readily or unproblematically coordinate their outer actions with.

Despite these contradictory ideas within the literature, authenticity remains what seems to be an important notion of spirituality in the workplace or perhaps more accurately, of the concept of spiritual well-being. In addition to what might be a natural inclination for people to live holistic and authentic lives at work, engaging the whole person at work has been suggested as a reason for improved work performance (Duchon and Plowman, 2005). Presumably, this could be because living authentically potentially fosters the capacity for innovation (Mitroff and Denton, 1999a; Mohan and Uys, 2006), which in turn facilitates organisational progress (I discuss in greater detail the theoretical arguments regarding the relation between spiritual well-being in the workplace and work performance in the second half of this chapter).

2.1.2 Meaning

According to Elm (2003) and Lips-Wiersma (2002), the quest for meaning or meaningfulness at work represents a notion frequently associated with the concept of spirituality in the workplace. This seems evident across many texts such as in Ashar and Lane-Maher, (2004), Ashmos and Duchon (2000), Barrett (2009), Duchon and Plowman (2005), Kinjerski and Skrypnek (2004), Mitroff and Denton (1999), Mohan and Uys (2006), Reave (2005) and van Tonder and Ramdass (2009). In a way, the notion of meaning refers to the idea of calling, that is, what one's purpose in life at work may be (see for e.g. Conklin, 2012). The recurring association of the notion of meaning with spirituality in the workplace within the literature gives the impression that it is a central notion of the concept.

The assumed centrality of the quest for meaning to spirituality in the workplace can similarly be observed if we examine the specific research area of meaning. For instance, Baumeister and Vohs (2002), in their article titled 'The Pursuit of Meaningfulness of Life', wrote about four meaning needs, that is, the needs for purpose, values, a sense of efficacy and a basis for self-worth. Although Baumeister and Vohs (2002) are referring to life in

general rather than to work specifically, the meaning needs they write about seem to correspond closely to notions of spirituality in the workplace as developed in this thesis⁵. What this perhaps means is that spiritual well-being in the workplace can be framed in terms of meaningfulness in life at work. What this may then also indicate is that the meaning of life is not disconnected from the meaning of work; the degree to which they overlap perhaps lies with the individual and the prominence of work in his or her life.

The close association between the notion of meaning and spirituality in the workplace can be explained by the following two arguments. First, the quest for meaning in life, according to Baumeister and Vohs (2002), is what makes us distinctly human. Second, human beings' search for meaning, Duchon and Plowman (2005) assert, is what "defines us as spiritual beings" (p.814). Placed together, these two arguments suggest that we reflect our humanness and our spiritual inclinations when we seek work to be a meaningful endeavour. And because work for the majority of the workforce increasingly represents a central element of their lives (Baldry et al., 2007), it is perhaps natural for human beings to seek deeper meaning in what they do at work.

The notion of meaning in the literature generally refers to the employees' innate inclination to seek work that has a larger or higher purpose, that is, a worthy purpose beyond merely earning a salary. By and large, work that has a larger purpose has characteristically been described in the literature as work that is altruistic; it is about others and about service to society (Mirvis, 1997; Pfeffer, 2003; Word 2012) rather than about oneself. For example, proponents of this thinking describe spirituality in the workplace as "serving others", "making a difference" and contributing to a "greater good" or a "higher purpose" (Kinjerski and Skrypnek, 2004, pp. 34-35), or as "service to God or to their fellow human beings" (Reave, 2005, p.666). As such, the meaning of work defined within the literature on spirituality in the workplace transcends personal or material gain. Nevertheless, altruistic acts are, according to Robinson and Smith (2014), possibly also acts that generate self-worth. In this sense, it is possible that meaningful work is not altogether altruistic or selfless.

⁵ The four meaning needs (i.e. purpose, values, a sense of efficacy and a basis for self-worth) as described by Baumeister and Vohs (2002), seem to correspond to the notions of spirituality in the workplace (i.e. authenticity, meaning, connection, values and growth) developed within this literature review, albeit more explicit in some than in others.

Relatedly, and according to Clarke (2006), the notion of meaning in literature on spirituality should not be unqualified and unrestricted. Clarke (2006) argues that the term ‘meaning’ in spirituality ought to refer to deeper and ultimate concerns, clearly distinguishing the term from the superficial or mundane. Having said that, Clarke (2006) also clarifies that the term ‘meaning’ should not be detached from reality and the more material aspects of life. This is perhaps a reminder for proponents to differentiate what is meant by the term ‘meaning’ in a more generic sense from ‘spiritual meaning’ as well as to uncover “the content and context of meaning” (Clarke, 2006, p.916).

Be that as it may, there are some other inconsistencies within the literature that need clarification. Firstly, there are reasons to in fact question the employees’ altruistic inclinations. Mitroff and Denton’s (1999) participants⁶, for example, listed ‘making money’ as more meaningful to them in their jobs than being of service to others. Secondly, studies in the area largely seem indifferent to influences inherent in the domain of work that may stifle this quest for meaning. For instance, the pressures to deliver on narrowly-prescribed organisational targets, such as profitability targets, can potentially give rise to self-centred and opportunistic work cultures. According to Ackers and Preston (1997), business enterprises and their management have “no higher purpose than to make profits” (p.695). As such, these work contexts can potentially constrain the employees’ innate inclination for meaningfulness and a larger purpose at work.

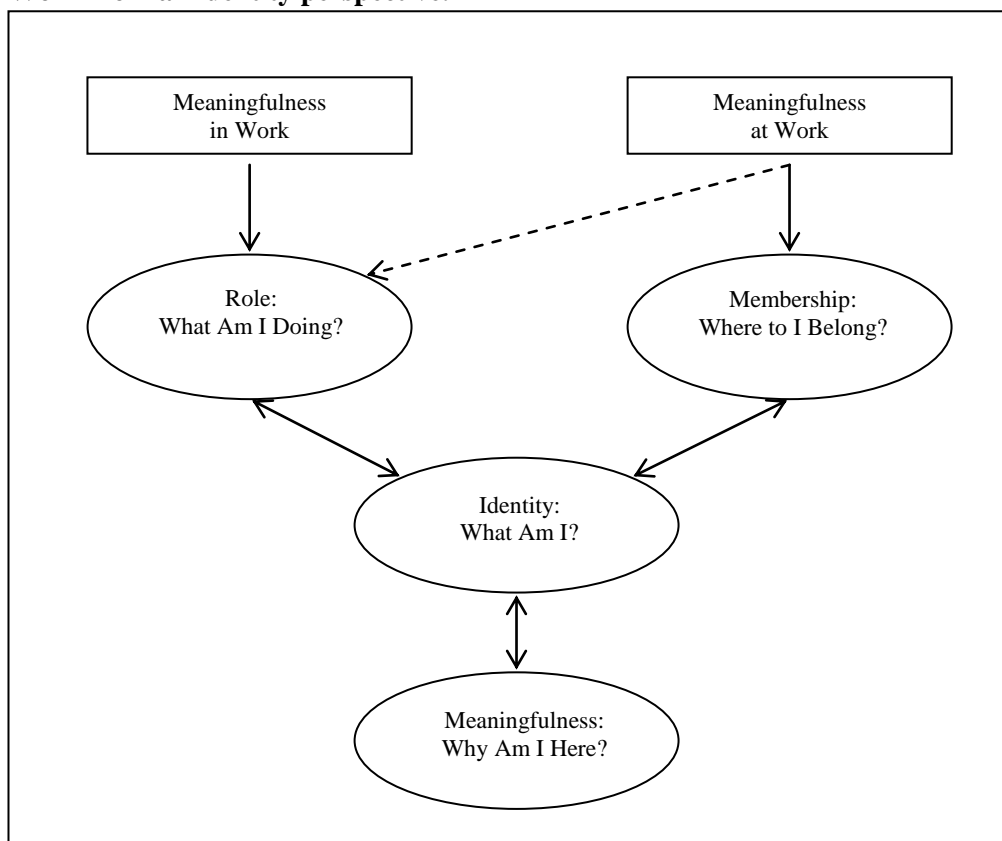
A survey of three models of meaningful work selected from literature in the area seems to illustrate this occasional indifference to such constraints to the quest for meaningfulness at work. The first model is by Pratt and Ashforth (2003). The authors posit that, in relation to work, meaningfulness is ultimately influenced by two things: the role the employee engages in and the employee’s sense of membership while at work (see Figure 2.1).

The second model of meaningful work is by Chalofsky (2003). The author proposes the concept of meaningful work to be dependent on the interplay of three interrelated elements, namely *Sense of Self*, *The Work Itself* and *Sense of Balance*⁷ (see Figure 2.2).

⁶ Research participants consist of senior executives, senior managers and human resource executives based in organisations on the East and West coast of the United States of America (Mitroff and Denton, 1999).

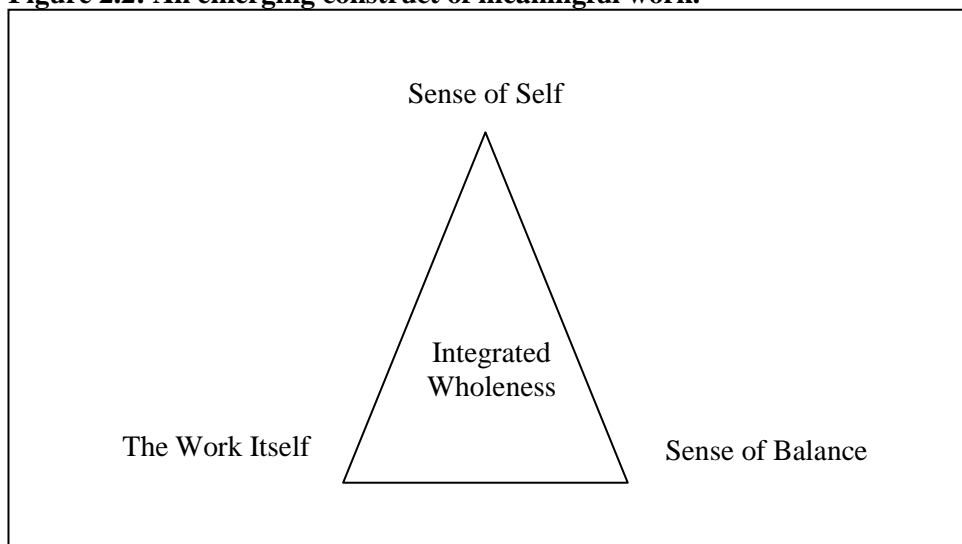
⁷ The element of *Sense of Self* includes ideas such as bringing one’s whole self to work and knowing how work fits with one’s purpose in life. The element of *The Work Itself* includes ideas such as challenge, creativity, learning and continuous growth. The element of *Sense of Balance* includes ideas such as the balance between the personal and work self, between giving to oneself and giving to others (Chalofsky, 2003).

Figure 2.1: An Overview of Creating Meaningfulness in Working and at Work from an identity perspective.



Reproduced from Pratt and Ashforth (2003, p.313)

Figure 2.2: An emerging construct of meaningful work.



Reproduced from Chalofsky (2003, p.77)

These two models focus almost exclusively on ways employees can foster meaningfulness. They seem to ignore that which may instead cause meaninglessness. For instance, Pratt and Ashforth's (2003) model only emphasises elements that enhances the employees' tasks and

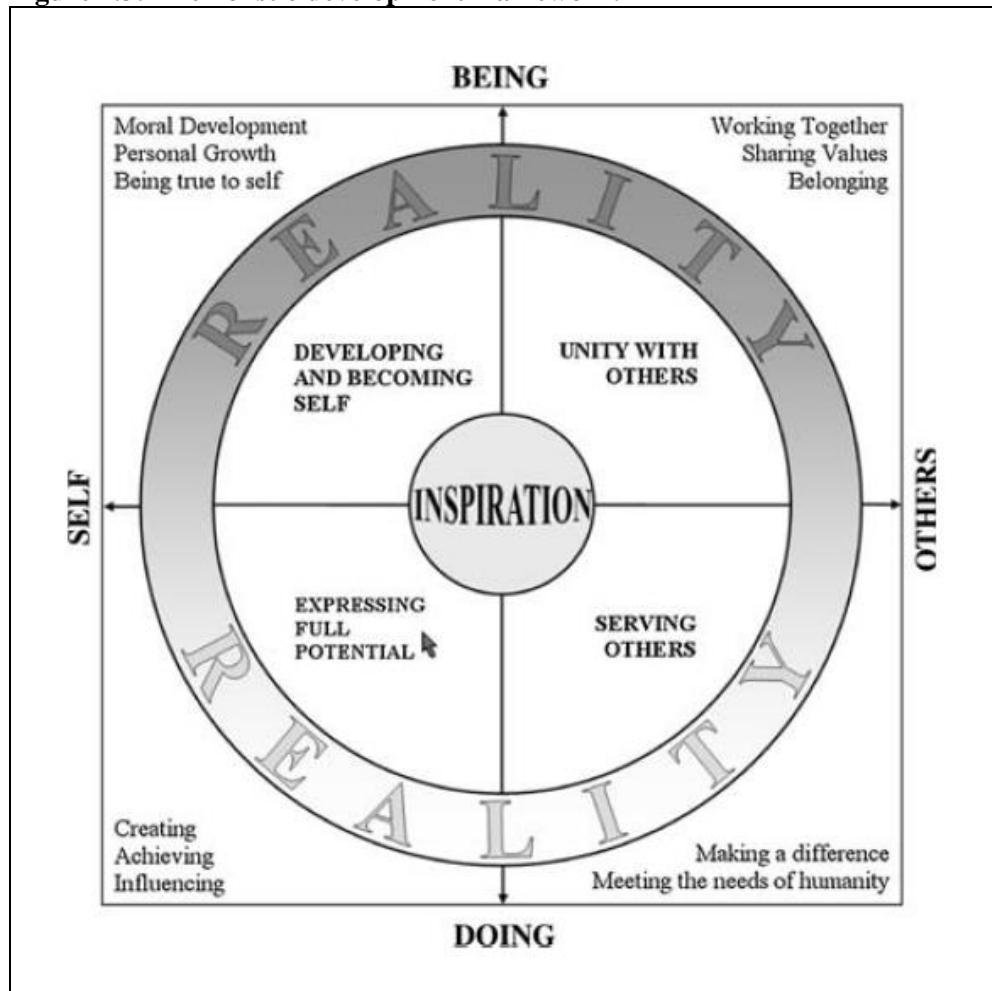
membership, thus focusing solely on ways to foster meaningfulness. Although Chalofsky (2003) notes the need to balance between self and others (as suggested in the element of *Sense of Balance*), his model similarly includes only ideas that are ‘positive’ for meaningfulness to occur. As an example, Chalofsky discusses the element of *The Work Itself* by considering only positive ideas such as “challenge, creativity, learning, continuous growth” (p.77) and “(t)he opportunity to carry out one’s purpose through the work” (p.77).

So, while these two models represent useful frameworks to understand the quest for meaningfulness in relation to work, they nonetheless omit an assessment of possible ‘negative’ aspects of work that may equally enhance our understanding of the employee’s quest for meaning.

In contrast to the two models discussed earlier, the third model of meaningful work offers, what seems to be, a more balanced perspective on the quest for meaning. Among other things, Lips-Wiersma and Morris' (2009) holistic development framework highlights the possible disparity between the employees’ ideals and their realities at work (depicted in the framework as ‘inspiration’ and ‘reality’ respectively) and this disparity’s influences on meaning-making (see Figure 2.3).

Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009) conclude that meaningful work stems not just from living out one’s ideals but also from “coming to terms” (p.506) with the, more often than not, imperfect reality. Meaningfulness, Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009) add, comes from accepting the less than ideal reality, being able to acknowledge and articulate these imperfections as well as from giving equal emphasis to material reality. Even in the holistic development framework, however, and based purely on excerpts of the participants’ stories in the publication, there was a strong sense that meaningful work came from acquiescence and compromise rather than genuine engagement with the, less than ideal, realities at work. While acquiescence and compromises of one’s ideals may not be totally avoidable in the workplace, it is less clear how employees reconcile the discordance between their inclination for meaningful work with aspects of work that stifles meaning or that instead fosters meaninglessness.

Figure 2.3: The holistic development framework.



Reproduced from Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009, p.503)

Finally, the idea of meaning or meaningful work within some texts has a tendency to come across as either absolute or non-relative (for e.g., Fry et al., 2011; Pawar, 2009). That is, it is immutable and assumed to be either present or absent, possible or impossible, rather than more or less meaningful depending on circumstances intrinsic and/or extrinsic to the individuals concerned. This is perhaps why there is a call for “a critical engagement with the spiritual” (Robinson and Smith, 2014, p.37) or to examine the meaning of work in terms of the connections people experience while at work (Mirvis, 1997).

2.1.3 Connection

It is suggested in Section 2.1.2 that the quest for meaning likely represents a notion central to the concept of spirituality in the workplace. If that is so, and if, as proposed by Baumeister and Vohs (2002) that “(t)he essence of meaning is connection” (p.608),

spirituality is also plausibly very much about connections. In what is generally considered as one of the pioneer studies of spirituality in the workplace, Mitroff and Denton (1999) conclude that the crux of employees' perceptions of what spirituality is can be represented by the term 'interconnectedness'.

The notion of connection or interconnectedness within the literature can come across as all-encompassing. For instance, spirituality in the workplace has been described as connectedness to either a divine or divine-like presence (Mitroff and Denton, 1999), "something larger than self" (Kinjerski and Skrypnek, 2004, p.36) or to other people, humanity or nature (Ashforth and Pratt, 2003). The notion of connection seems particularly evident in Mitroff and Denton's (1999) study where participants describe spirituality to mean that "(e)verything is interconnected with everything else. Everything affects and is affected by everything else" (p.89). Even if we accept Swinton and Pattison's (2010) argument (see section 2.1) of the importance of imprecise definitions in the discourse of spirituality, such descriptions appear especially vague.

Nonetheless, some literature relate to the notion of connection in more specific ways. They seem to emphasise two things. First, employees are inclined to want to feel connected with their co-workers (Ashmos and Duchon, 2000; van Tonder and Ramdass, 2009). These arguments seem to suggest, for instance, that employees seek camaraderie at work. Second, employees aspire to feel connected to a common worthwhile purpose (Ashmos and Duchon, 2000; Kinjerski and Skrypnek, 2004). These two things likely facilitate a sense of community and belonging in the workplace, and lead to trust, respect and intimacy among work community members which, according to Kinjerski and Skrypnek (2004), advances the achievement of their common worthwhile purposes.

The notion of connection within the literature, as such, appears very much related to the notion of meaning. For instance, Ashforth and Pratt's (2003) model of meaningful work (see Figure 2.1) explicitly describes meaningfulness *in* work and meaningfulness *at* work, which is perhaps another way of referring to the connectedness an employee may feel towards work and towards his or her work community. Not unlike the notion of meaning, the notion of connection, as it is conceptualised by researchers in the area, seem to omit discussions about 'negative' connections or connections that are antithetical to spirituality in the workplace, which are likely to be present in the workplace.

Additionally, and as suggested by Robinson and Smith (2014), connections are about one's awareness of and responsiveness to one's contexts, including one's self. A case in point is when Robinson and Smith (2014) suggest that altruistic acts nurture the sense of connection between oneself and others, thereby facilitating self-worth. As such, connections help employees locate themselves in relation to the external world, including the world of work. "I know my place, I know where I belong", thus comments one of Pattakos' (2004) participants while relating his or her experience of meaningful work in government service.

But while the literature discusses to some extent the awareness of and responsiveness to one's contexts at work, such as one's work and one's work community, the influences owing to the interaction between one's self and one's contexts receives less attention. Instinctive as it may be for employees to seek and develop meaningful connections within the domain of work, there seems to be fewer discussions surrounding the ways employees interact with their contexts, including aspects that generate 'negative' connections.

2.1.4 Values

Values is the fourth notion that is commonly found to be associated with the concept of spirituality in the workplace. According to value theory (Schwartz, 2012), values are deemed to be a significant aspect of who we are and what we consider as important in life. Part of the research interest in value theory resides in the study of work, including how values govern our attitudes and behaviours (Ros et al., 1999). Research on spirituality in the workplace can also be described as focusing on similar interests, that is, on identity and the quest for what is important in life at work, and the corresponding influences these may have on employees and in the domain of work. Interestingly, the initial conceptualisation of value theory includes a consideration of spirituality as constituting a basic human value⁸ (Schwartz, 2012). Although spirituality was eventually not included explicitly in the theory, notions related to spirituality such as "a spiritual life, meaning in life, inner harmony, detachment, unity with nature, accepting my portion in life, devout" (Schwartz, 2012, p.7), remain part of the value theory. The point is the notion of values appears pertinent for understanding spirituality in the workplace.

⁸ Schwartz (2012) explains that spirituality was ultimately excluded from the theory because its meaning was demonstrated to be inconsistent across cultures and hence less consequential to the development of a universal values theory.

In the main, studies in spirituality in the workplace discuss values as values seem to be generally understood, that is, as a set of guiding principles that governs work behaviour (McGhee and Grant, 2008). Some researchers in the area attempt to describe what they mean by personal values although descriptions can be either very broad or very specific. For instance, Milliman et al (1999) contends that “spirituality is reflected through values such as making a contribution to humankind” (p.222). On the other hand, others suggest that spirituality manifests in specific personal values such as virtue (Cavanagh and Bandsuch, 2002), honesty (Elm, 2003), and benevolence, respect, justice and integrity (Jurkiewicz and Giacalone, 2004). In fact, some researchers in the area directly equate personal values to spiritual beliefs (e.g. Hoffman, 2003). If organisations are perceived as spiritual entities, spirituality in the workplace may in part be defined by organisational values and purposes (see for e.g. Burack, 1999; Fawcett et al., 2008).

The significance of values as part of spirituality in the workplace is evident when we consider how values seem embedded in other notions of the concept. For instance, the inclinations for authenticity, meaning and connection can be viewed as values an employee aspires towards, that is, a set of guiding principles that govern work behaviour. Moreover, aligning one’s values with one’s work or having shared values with one’s work community fosters connectedness and a sense of community, aspects related to the notion of connection. More often than not, however, studies in the area argue as well as provide evidence for the importance of values in employee engagement and organisational success (e.g. Fry, 2003; Jurkiewicz and Giacalone, 2004; Kolodinsky et al., 2008; Pfeffer, 2003). Values-centred organisations, Pfeffer (2003) argues, “excel at engaging the hearts and minds of their people” (p.32) and creating a work climate that facilitates spirituality or spiritual well-being in the workplace.

While there may be some truth to these claims, discussions about values per se seem limited to, what are perceivably, more virtuous values. The treatment and selectivity of the discourse within the literature on values, in turn, is in danger of perpetuating views of spirituality merely as a commodity to be exploited for organisational gain. Corporate social responsibility programs, for example, could be accused of being vehicles for such veiled intentions. This is further compounded by the general absence in the literature of questioning also the virtuousness of organisational aims or the possible incompatibility of virtuous values in a corporate context.

To redress this, spirituality in the workplace research can perhaps expand on its conceptualisation of values by drawing from related areas such as value theory. Value theory, for instance, identifies less well accepted values, such as hedonism and power, as part of basic human values. Additionally, values are perceived by value theory as the “criteria people use to select and justify actions and to evaluate people (including the self) and events ... rather than as qualities inherent in objects” (Schwartz, 1992, p.1). Schwartz (2012) is of the opinion that people, at different times, pursue conflicting values because the importance people attribute to their values are contextual. It is thus possible that understanding the ways employees prioritise their values at work, including seemingly negative ones, sheds additional light on identity, meaning and connection, and by extension, on what the concept of spirituality in the workplace may mean.

I now turn to the topic of religion, an issue which the majority of the literature address while defining spirituality in the workplace. It is perhaps apt to discuss religion in this section because of two things. First, values, as discussed within spirituality in the workplace literature, tend to be morally and ethically grounded. They generally relate to “doing the right thing or making the right choices” (Mohan and Uys, 2006, p.55) or to doing good (Mitroff and Denton, 1999). To discuss what is morally and ethically right is to, arguably, invite discussions about religion. Second, according to value theory, religion is conceived as a possible source for one’s basic values (Schwartz, 2012). Religion remains an important topic, as with Lips-Wiersma et al.’s (2009) assessment of the ‘dark side’ of spirituality in the workplace, since a substantial portion of criticisms of the area seemed premised on the relatedness of religion to spirituality.

Religion, according to King (2007), is “an institutional and organizational domain, confined and determined by creed, theologies, and doctrines about man’s current and eternal destiny, his relationship with himself and others around him, and God (or some transcendent or supreme being)” (p.104). The relation between spirituality and religion can be explained this way: “(s)pirituality is moral and emotional in nature and involves an understanding and appreciation of one’s position in the universe” (p.605) while religion facilitates spirituality (Bierly III et al., 2000). Although the term spirituality can be seen to accommodate religious beliefs (see for e.g. Fry, 2003), religiosity is generally not perceived by researchers in the area as a prerequisite for spirituality (Mitroff and Denton, 1999; Dent et al., 2005).

However, it has been suggested that distinguishing religion from spirituality may be unnecessary and impractical. According to Mohamad et al. (2004), the world's major religions encourage the search for meaning in life, a commonly cited and central notion of spirituality in the workplace. Additionally, Geertz (1983) depicts religion as a cultural system that facilitates the search for meaning and purpose. This is possibly why some people, according to Reave (2005), feel the concept of religion and spirituality overlap. Regardless of such distinctions, the topic of religion in the secular workplace raises controversy and can be unpopular due to the mutual distrust and suspicion between business goals and religious ideals (Cavanagh and Bandsuch, 2002), the dangers of proselytization and invasion of privacy (Reave, 2005), the risks of coercion and division (Cavanagh, 1999) and the fear of potential legal and political repercussions (King, 2007) in the workplace.

Yet, the topic of religion within the concept of spirituality in the workplace cannot be avoided or ignored entirely. Empirical studies have shown that some employees may conflate the two concepts (van Tonder and Ramdass, 2009). Employees may also tend to describe spirituality using both religious and non-religious terms. For instance, Kinjerski and Skrypnik's (2004) study shows that working professionals describe spirituality using a variety of terms such as "heart and soul, the influence and authority of conscience, gifts from the soul, intention, God, Holy Spirit or Guardian" (p.38), with the latter ones clearly carrying religious connotations. In the attempt to be inclusive, definitions may need to adequately accommodate religious and non-religious meanings simultaneously. Alternatively, as attempted by Paloutzian et al. (2003), dual definitions⁹ may be an option. Individuals and organisations are then free to associate with whichever definition that resonates with their values and beliefs.

2.1.5 Growth

It is not uncommon for many researchers in the area to link the concept of spirituality in the workplace with the notion of growth (see for e.g. Ashforth and Pratt, 2003; Hoffman, 2003; Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003; Mohan and Uys, 2006). These researchers

⁹ This definitional duality is also observed in the Oxford Dictionary, which provides two meanings for the word 'spiritual': (1) as "(r)elating to or affecting the human spirit or soul as opposed to material or physical things"; and (2) as "(r)elating to religion or religious belief" (Oxford University Press, 2015).

generally assume that people have a tendency to want to develop themselves in the workplace. Barrett (2009) suggests that attending to one's growth or development in itself is already a meaningful, and by extension, spiritual endeavour. This is also perhaps the reason Dehler and Welsh (2003) liken work that provides meaning and purpose to spiritual growth. In a similar manner, the ability of the employees to experience and deepen their sense of authenticity, meaning, connection and values in their work and the workplace could be indicative of one's spiritual growth.

The conventional view of the professional development of employees such as the enhancement of work-related skills, competencies and knowledge is considered a facet of the notion of growth (Pfeffer, 2003). Correspondingly, Burack (1999) emphasises that spiritual growth is inclusive of mental growth. The view in Pfeffer's (2003) and Burack's (1999) writing perhaps suggests that people are holistic beings, and that it is not possible to compartmentalise spiritual growth from the development of our physical, mental and emotional selves. This contention is also observed in Barrett (2009) when he suggests that "as souls having a human experience, our physical bodies, our emotional stability, and our intellectual prowess are vitally important to further our spiritual growth" (p.265).

The literature also invokes Maslow's motivation theory, specifically the disposition of a fairly healthy person's in a fairly healthy context for self-actualisation, as part of spiritual growth (e.g. Pfeffer, 2003; Barrett, 2009; Mohan and Uys, 2006). For instance, Ashforth and Pratt (2003) define a dimension of spirituality in the workplace to be "a sense of self-development or self-actualization, a realization of one's aspirations and potential" (p.94). This is perhaps to be expected since Maslow himself discusses self-actualization in relation to dedicating oneself to his or her calling, and to work that one considers important and worthwhile (Maslow, 1998). In this sense, the notion of growth in spirituality in the workplace literature seem consistent with what Sheldrake (2013) refers to as "the concept of "thriving" – what it means for humans to thrive and how we come to thrive" (p.4). It is also possible that spiritual growth, self-actualization and thriving, are attempts to satiate our meaning needs, as proposed by Baumeister and Vohs (2002), specifically our need for a sense of efficacy and a basis of self-worth.

However, researchers ought to be mindful of Maslow's (1998) preconditions for self-actualisation, that is, a fairly healthy person in a fairly healthy context. The point to note is that Maslow (1998) did not theorise self-actualisation for every person regardless of his or

her contexts. He nevertheless seemed to believe that, given the right conditions, people will flourish as will a fruit tree bear good fruit given the right amount of sun, water, temperature and nutrients. Maslow (1998) also warns that self-actualization rarely means isolated introspection; it is more likely to come from precisely the opposite, that is, from active engagement. Relatedly, Robinson and Smith (2014) argue for relational growth instead of focusing narrowly on individualised self-actualisation. And if spiritual growth is comparable with self-actualization, it may likewise be subject to certain healthy conditions, involve active engagement with a meaningful task and is relational.

2.2 Defining the concept further

In this section, two additional observations regarding the five notions examined above are discussed. After that, possible general limitations of current definitions in the area are noted before the first part of this chapter is concluded.

The first observation is that, while spirituality in the workplace may consist of the five notions, the concept does not seem to be merely made up of a combination of five separate notions. Each of the notions seems to help define the other notions. For instance, the notion of authenticity is comparable to, compatible with and even contingent upon the notion of connection. The inclination to live holistic, integrated and authentic lives at work (authenticity) seems very much associated with the connections people make in the domain of work (connection). In many ways too, the notion of connection is interrelated with the quest for meaning, meaningfulness and the sense of a larger more worthwhile purpose in one's work, which seem to be simultaneously guided by one's values, and one's growth and self-actualizing tendencies. As another example, the alignment of values between oneself and others or shared values likely fosters a sense of connectedness and community.

The point is that, as Kinjerski and Skyrpnek's (2004) participants assert, the concept of spirituality in the workplace is viewed as a holistic experience, in that "the whole is greater than the sum of the parts" (p.39). Perhaps another way to define the concept is to borrow from the way Maslow (1998) favoured pluralism of values when he defined B-values¹⁰. Maslow argues that "*each* B-value, if it is fully defined to its limit, turns out to be defined in terms of each and all of the other B-values" (Maslow, 1998, p.149). Likewise, each of

¹⁰ B-values, or Being-values, constitute the kinds of values that are perceived by self-actualizing and fully functioning people (Maslow, 1999). In total, Maslow (1998) listed 14 B-values.

the five notions seems to relate closely with each other as they each also help define the concept of spirituality in the workplace.

There is another important point to make here although it is somewhat tangential to the ongoing discussion. All of the notions are not necessarily restricted to the domain of work; they can be viewed from a broader perspective such as in relation to life in general. The degree to which these notions are taken as part of the concept of spirituality in the workplace perhaps is contingent upon the extent of the emphasis and integration of one's work in one's life. In this sense, distinguishing between the term *spirituality* and *spirituality in the workplace* may be redundant in cases where work and non-work (or personal) domains, as experienced by the respective persons, are not distinguishable.

The second observation regarding the definition of spirituality in the workplace and the five notions is that it seems appropriate to view the concept as “an experience and a way of being” (Neal, 2003). Discussions in the literature about the notions of authenticity, meaning, connection, values and growth seem largely experiential. The notions represent what people conceive and perceive them to be based on their experience of work. The presumed reflection that takes place, if notions are thus based on experience, indicates some degree of internalisation for those who experience them. In this way, the concept of spirituality in the workplace can be said to be experientially-based and represents a way of being.

Linked with this second observation are two additional observations. First, experiences and ways of being, as depicted by the five notions, are primarily about the individual (see for e.g. Biberman and Tischler, 2008; Kinjerski and Skrypnek, 2004; van Tonder and Ramdass, 2009). While the notion of meaning, for instance, may be viewed in relation to one's contexts or to other people, they originate from the person. What is therefore meaningful resides in the person's conception and perception of his or her experiences. This is perhaps why definitions of the concept become interwoven with deeply-held perspectives of writers on the subject. As Dehler and Welsh (2010) argue, definitions of spirituality in the workplace reflect choices “driven by underlying personal values and cultural biases” (p.70); this seems evident whether definitions are offered by authors writing a conceptual piece or by the research participants stating their personal views. This is not to suggest that the concept of spirituality in the workplace cannot be viewed as a collective phenomenon. Organisations, according to Mohan and Uys (2006), can be

perceived by their employees as spiritual entities. However, and with respect to the five notions, viewing the concept of spirituality in the workplace as an individual phenomenon represents a crucial vantage point to understanding it.

Second, experiences and ways of being, as found in the five notions, appear cognitive as well as affective. In their effort to define the concept, Kinjerski and Skrypnek's (2004) analysis shows that their participants' experience of spirituality in the workplace can be described as affective. According to Robinson and Smith (2014), spirituality cannot be apprehended by cognitive means alone because it involves meaning and connection, notions that emerge through engagement which, in essence, is also affective. Spirituality, Robinson and Smith (2014) add, cannot be discussed objectively and with rational reasoning alone. Aspects of feelings and attitudes seem very much part of what a person may, for instance, qualify to be meaningful, authentic, or as part of one's values, as fostering connection and growth. Without recognition of the affective, definitions of spirituality in the workplace would only partially reflect the experiences they are based on.

A potential limitation of the above review is that current definitions of the spirituality in the workplace concept may only reflect western values. Except for South Africa (e.g. Van Tonder and Ramdass, 2009; Mohan and Uys, 2006) and New Zealand (Lips-Wiersma, 2002), all other identified literature in the area have been conducted in The United Kingdom, Europe, The United States of America or in Canada. As such, the perspectives of spirituality in the workplace discussed above may not adequately represent views in other cultural spheres, for example in Asia.

Another potential limitation is the disparateness of research efforts in their attempts to define the concept, including this research. Among other problematic areas, MacDonald (2011) points out that the experience of spirituality "escapes adequate representation in language and linguistic structures" (p.197) for the majority of people. There are also, MacDonald (2011) continues, other disparities in current studies, namely in the methods they use and a bias towards only positive outcomes, that impair progress in defining the concept. Although there are suggestions to overcome such limitations (see MacDonald, 2011), research in the area in this respect is perhaps still in its infancy.

Thus far, definitions of the concept of spirituality in the workplace within relevant literature have been reviewed and synthesised. Five common notions of the concept were

derived from this review, which seem to be inter-related and represent the holistic, cognitive and affective experience of individuals. In a corollary fashion, the concept of spiritual well-being has also been reviewed and could be defined as the experience and way of being that is realised when one or more of these five notions are enacted in the individual's life at work.

2.3 Work performance with regard to spiritual well-being

This is the second part of Chapter 2. The main focus of this portion is to examine the literature on spirituality in the workplace with regard to work performance. Organisational scholarship and practice are generally concerned with improving work performance of some level or some kind. Whether made explicit or not, a substantial portion of research in spirituality in the workplace exhibit a similar interest. However, there are some researchers (e.g. Benefiel, 2007; Mitroff and Denton, 1999a) who argue that spirituality should be sought for its own sake. Nonetheless, they too raise discussions about the influence of spiritual well-being on organisational performance. On the whole, studies in the area generally suggest that organisations that exhibit the qualities of spiritual well-being are generally more efficient. This is likely a chief factor driving interest in examining work performance in the area.

What might be pertinent at this point is to qualify what I mean by work performance. Work performance is defined as the enhancement of or improvement in efficiency, productivity, in meeting and or exceeding work goals, expectations and targets, and similar concepts. The definition is intentionally framed broadly in order for this research to facilitate a wider scope of work performance in its literature review. Work performance is defined specifically in Chapter 3 when the research site and the corresponding choice of research participants are discussed.

There are perhaps two related issues about research in the area that need to be addressed prior to examining the extant literature on work performance. Firstly, according to Lips-Wiersma et al. (2009), there are substantially more studies that explore the potential benefits of rather than the possible detriment of spiritual well-being. Dent et al. (2005) suggest that there are dangers associated with research that asks whether an increase in spiritual well-being in the workplace leads to a corresponding increase in work

performance. Part of this could be because, despite the potential for greater work performance, the “increased spirituality would presumably prohibit an individual from certain forms of work” (Dent et al., 2005, p.639). As such, views regarding the potential increase in work performance due to spiritual well-being may not be tenable in some circumstances.

Secondly, there appears to be divided views among organisational researchers on whether spirituality or spiritual well-being is measurable (Dent et al., 2005). One perspective seems to be that if we cannot measure it, we cannot evidence it, a view that is likely fuelled by a predilection for hard data. Alternatively, spirituality can be viewed as “ephemeral” and “approachable from multiple perspectives (Case and Gosling, 2010, p.263), thus resisting unambiguous and neat conceptualising. This divide seems to resemble the paradigm wars, what may be known as the clash between the assumptions of quantitative (or positivist) and qualitative (or interpretivist) research (Bryman, 2008).

These two related issues are addressed in further detail as they emerge in the subsequent literature review. Nonetheless, it seems important to explain at the outset that both quantitative and qualitative research and evidence are examined in this literature review. While there may be serious reservations about whether spirituality is measurable (or not) and commensurable to the positivist paradigm, quantitative studies nonetheless may be able to measure “closely correlated manifestations of spirituality” (Dent et al., 2005, p.639). As such, there is a potential for quantitative studies to provide insights about general trends between spiritual well-being and aspects of work including work performance, which qualitative studies are less able shed light on.

On the other hand, significant research can be conducted in the absence of numerical data. According to Bryman and Bell (2011), qualitative studies are able to generate more nuanced understanding of people’s perspective of the phenomena under investigation and thus provide insights that may supplement, challenge and augment theoretical arguments and evidence supplied by quantitative studies. Mitroff agrees when he suggest that the positivist’s paradigm alone is insufficient to study complex issues like spirituality, and that the interpretivist’s paradigm instead ought to be included (Dean, 2004). In a sense then, both quantitative *and* qualitative studies perhaps have the potential to shed light on different aspects of the phenomena.

As such, the specific objective in the second half of this chapter is to examine studies that suggest, propose or evidence a link, positive or negative, between spiritual well-being and work performance. This review is guided by two questions. The first question is ‘*what* are the possible relations between spiritual well-being and work performance?’ The second question is ‘*how* and *why* spiritual well-being and work performance are claimed to be related?’ The first question seeks empirical evidence on how these two concepts may be related while the second question focuses on the theoretical arguments within the studies reviewed. Studies that conduct primary empirical research are given priority.

In order to examine the evidence and theoretical arguments in a systematic manner, I begin with a review of quantitative studies in the area and posed the two questions on them. The process is repeated afterwards for qualitative studies in the area. Next, I identify and focus on key theoretical arguments studies make about the possible relation between spiritual well-being and work performance. In the final section of chapter, relevant criticisms of spirituality in the workplace research are explored.

2.3.1 Evidence and theoretical arguments

2.3.1.1 Quantitative studies

A substantial portion of studies in the area use statistical methods to describe the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance; these studies invariably use survey tools to collect data (see for e.g. Albuquerque et al., 2014; Fry et al., 2005; Harrington et al., 2001; Kolodinsky et al., 2008; Milliman et al., 2003; Rego and Cunha, 2008; Sengupta, 2010). It seems likely that these studies come from a positivist or post-positivist stance although they do not always explicitly state or explore reasons for taking such a stance. In the main, these studies suggest a positive link between spiritual well-being and work performance, furnishing readers with possible theoretical arguments that might substantiate the link. Rego and Cunha’s (2008) study represents a typical example of quantitative studies in this area and thus will be used to help illustrate the points these studies make.

Rego and Cunha’s (2008) study surveyed 361 individuals across 154 organisations. The construct of spirituality in the workplace¹¹ in their study consists of five dimensions: (i)

¹¹ Although Rego and Cunha (2008) use the more neutral term ‘spirituality in the workplace’, the authors imply the term to mean a sense of *well-being* that arises from meeting a set of spiritual needs in the domain

team's sense of community, (ii) alignment with organisational values, (iii) sense of contribution to society, (iv) enjoyment at work, and (v) opportunities for inner life. Owing to the definitional diversity in the area, Rego and Cunha (2008) selected the dimensions of spirituality in the workplace from other empirical (Milliman et al., 2003; Mitroff and Denton, 1999; Ashmos and Duchon, 2000) and conceptual studies (Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003; Mohamad et al., 2004). In this way, Rego and Cunha's (2008) conceptualisation of spirituality in the workplace is consistent, to some degree, with other studies in the area.

As a proxy for work performance, Rego and Cunha (2008) chose the construct of organisational commitment. Organisational commitment, the authors contend, receives wide interest in organisational research and is possibly connected to a range of positive employee conduct including team and organisational performance. Adopted from Allen and Meyer (1996, 2000), the construct of organisational commitment consists of three facets, i.e. affective, normative and continuance commitment. According to Rego and Cunha (2008), Allen and Meyer (2000) predict that only affective commitment and normative commitment are positively related to an increase in investment and dedication to one's organisation. Hence, Rego and Cunha's (2008) study sought to investigate the possible link between spirituality in the workplace and work performance by way of establishing statistical correlation between spirituality in the workplace and organisational commitment.

Their findings show that employees that rated themselves high on the spirituality in the workplace survey scale also rated themselves high on affective and normative commitment. As such, Rego and Cunha (2008) theorise spiritual well-being and work performance to be linked in this way:

Spirituality in the workplace generates positive emotions, possibly resulting in positive employee work attitudes that include employees bringing their entire selves to work. These may contribute to enhancing affective and normative commitment among employees, leading to behaviours that result in improving organizational performance. (cf. Rego and Cunha, 2008, p.60 and p.69)

Based on studies like Rego and Cunha's (2008), three observations can be made about empirical studies in the area using survey-statistical methods, including their possible

of work. This is one example of research in the area that implies spiritual well-being in their use of the term 'spirituality in the workplace' (see Section 2.1).

limitations. First, the claim of positive correlation between spiritual well-being and work performance persists across these studies despite (1) the concept of spiritual well-being is conceptualised differently, though not wholly, and measured with different scales across these studies; and (2) not all components of the spiritual well-being construct in these studies show statistical correlation with work performance, that is, some components do while others do not. While there is yet to be substantial consensus on a more universal definition, such inconsistencies tend to complicate, if not dilute, the claims these studies attempt to make about the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance.

Furthermore, the strategy of using survey questionnaires as a method to measure abstract ideas such as sense of community, values, sense of contribution, which are considered to be intangible, are subject to much debate. Except for Milliman et al. (2003), who acknowledge that using survey methods to measure spiritual well-being can be problematic, other quantitative studies rarely address this issue. Without examining or being explicit about the possible methodological incompatibilities that arise from using the positivistic paradigm of inquiry, studies using survey-statistical methods in the area could invite criticisms regarding epistemological differences between the research phenomenon and research method. Such studies, Case and Gosling (2010) claim, come across intending to manipulate and distort the phenomena purely for organisational gain.

The second observation is that the positive correlation between spiritual well-being and work performance across these quantitative studies persists despite the use of a variety of proxy constructs for work performance. Aside from organisational commitment, other proxy constructs of work performance which these studies use include job involvement, organisational identification, work/reward satisfaction and organisational frustration (Kolodinsky et al., 2008); intention to quit, intrinsic work satisfaction, organisational-based self-esteem (Milliman et al., 2003); productivity (Fry et al., 2005); job satisfaction, organisational culture, teamwork, morale/climate (Kinjerski and Skrypnek, 2008b) (see Table 2.1). The wide array of proxy work performance that spiritual well-being is positively correlated to perhaps indicates the broad influence of spiritual well-being in organisation life.

Nevertheless, the use of proxy constructs to represent work performance is not without problems. The link between organisational commitment and work performance, for instance, can be debatable. While commenting on Allen and Meyer's (1996, 2000) work on

organisational commitment, Meyer and Herscovitch (2001) qualify that affective commitment explains for a diverse range of behavioural consequences and that these consequences “are implied rather than clearly specified in the definition and measures” (p.310). In other words, work performance may or may not be related to affective commitment.

So, even though Rego and Cunha’s (2008) study reports significant statistical correlation between affective commitment and spiritual well-being, work performance can only be loosely assumed rather than be taken as an actual eventuality of affective commitment. This then raises questions of other proxies and their reliability in representing work performance. Additionally, there is the possibility of an inverse influence, that organisational commitment instead is the outcome of the increase in work performance (see Polley et al., 2005).

The third observation is that the positive correlation between spiritual well-being and work performance seems to be reported across a wide range of employment sectors and employee levels, such as in the military (Fry et al., 2011), in healthcare (Kinjerski and Skrypnek, 2008b), among managers (Sengupta, 2010), full time workers enrolled as graduate students (Kolodinsky et al., 2008) and across employees in the service, manufacturing, government and healthcare sectors (Milliman et al., 2003) (see Table 2.1).

This observation perhaps indicates the extensive influence spiritual well-being has across sectors and job scopes, irrespective of the differences therein. However, and except for the rare occasion (see Fry et al., 2005), these studies generally do not explain what spiritual well-being may mean contextually, that is, within a particular sector, for a specific job or for a particular level of employee.

In retrospect, my Masters in Business Administration (MBA) research project (Yee, 2010) attempted to address some of these limitations. It examined the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance among healthcare sales representatives in Malaysia using a survey-statistical approach.

Table 2.1: Selected quantitative studies - constructs variables and sample population

Year	Authors	Construct of spirituality in the workplace or spiritual well-being	Proxy constructs for work performance	Employment sector/ Employee levels
2011	Fry et al.	1. Meaning/Calling 2. Membership	1. Organizational commitment 2. Productivity	Military personnel, specifically cadets at military academy
2010	Sengupta	1. Extent of spiritual orientation 2. Purpose and objective of spiritual orientation 3. Involvement in spiritual activities	1. Satisfaction 2. Effectiveness 3. Career success	Managers attending an executive development program
2008	Kodolinsky, Giacalone and Jurkiewicz	1. Human Spirituality Scale 2. Organizational Spiritual Values Scale 3. The purpose in life Scale	1. Job involvement 2. Org identification 3. Work/reward satisfaction 4. Organizational frustration	Full-time workers enrolled as graduate students at large universities
2008	Rego and Cunha	1. Team's sense of community 2. Alignment between organizational and individual values 3. Sense of contribution to community 4. Sense of enjoyment at work 5. Opportunities for inner life	1. Affective commitment 2. Normative commitment 3. Continuance commitment	361 individuals from 154 organizations *
2008	Kinjerski and Skrypnik	1. Engaging work 2. Sense of community 3. Mystical experience 4. Spiritual connection	1. Job satisfaction 2. Organizational commitment 3. Organizational culture 4. Teamwork 5. Morale/climate	Healthcare / Long-term care centre staff
2005	Fry et al.	1. Meaning/Calling 2. Membership	1. Organizational commitment 2. Productivity	Military personnel, specifically army soldiers
2003	Milliman, Czaplewski and Ferguson	1. Meaningful work 2. Sense of community 3. Alignment of values	1. Organizational commitment 2. Intention to quit 3. Intrinsic work satisfaction 4. Job involvement 5. Organization-based self-esteem	Part-time, evening MBA students attending business school in the southwest USA

* No other participants' details were provided in the publication.

For the research, I surveyed *actual* work performance data. Specifically, the survey questionnaires sought sales achievement data instead of proxy constructs to sales achievements. The rationale was that it mattered very little whether, or to what degree, healthcare sales representatives are ‘committed’ to their organisations because the sales representatives’ work performance in practice was based primarily on their sales achievements. Therefore, sales achievement represented the most important criterion for measuring a healthcare sales representative’s work performance.

Although my MBA research attempted to address the limitation of using proxy constructs of work performance, the research, just like the quantitative studies described earlier, had another important limitation – inflated statistical results (Milliman et al., 2003; Rego and Cunha, 2008). By having the same participants simultaneously supplying data for spiritual well-being and work performance measures on the survey questionnaire, quantitative studies effectively introduced bias into their empirical findings and conclusions.

However, there are some quantitative studies, such as Duchon and Plowman’s (2005) study, whose findings seem more robust. Briefly, Duchon and Plowman’s (2005) study investigates the impact of work unit spirituality on work unit performance within a healthcare setting, which they suggest is a setting that may be more receptive to spiritual notions. These work units consisted of emergency room/intensive care units and medical/surgery units across five different hospitals. Duchon and Plowman surveyed performance data the hospitals in their study used in practice, that is, the patients’ evaluation of (1) the overall quality of care, and (2) the overall sensitivity of staff providing the care. Duchon and Plowman’s (2005) study found a statistically significant and positive correlation between work unit spirituality and work unit work performance. Thus, Duchon and Plowman (2005) argue that “by enabling the expression of the spirit we create workplaces that are receptive to the “entire” or whole person, and as such, may be more productive than workplaces where spirit is ignored” (p. 826).

The evidence in Duchon and Plowman’s (2005) study appears more robust than other studies primarily due to two factors. The first factor is that the work performance survey ratings were not determined by study participants but by a different source, patients in their case, who were recipients of the study participants’ services. This first factor avoided the issue of inflated statistical results. The second factor, and relatedly to the first factor, is that the work performance data seems contextually relevant. Work performance for healthcare

work units was comprised of their patients' evaluation of the work units' services, which were part their work units' evaluation in practice. Thus, the work performance data collected for the study can be considered to be unbiased, credible, relevant and practice-related. Nevertheless, Duchon and Plowman's (2005) study still needs to be viewed in light of other limitations such as the methodological incompatibilities that may accompany the use of the positivistic paradigm of inquiry in spirituality in the workplace research.

There are other studies in the area that also attempt to survey actual work performance data, such as Petchsawang and Duchon (2012), Albuquerque et al. (2014) and Fry et al. (2011). However, Petchsawang and Duchon (2012) and Albuquerque et al.'s (2014) studies seem relatively less convincing than Duchon and Plowman's (2005) study. For instance, while Petchsawang and Duchon (2012) purportedly provide empirical support for the positive correlation between spirituality in the workplace and work performance in an Asian cultural context¹², the authors did not discuss how spirituality in the workplace, defined by the dimensions of compassion, mindfulness, meaningful work and transcendence, relates to their participants who were working in a food and baking establishment. On the other hand, Albuquerque et al.'s (2014) study findings, on the whole, seems ambiguous despite showing traces of evidence that might suggest a positive correlation between spirituality in the workplace and work performance¹³.

However, Fry et al.'s (2011) study findings allude to a very significant point for the current discussion. Conducted in a military setting, Fry et al.'s (2011) study found that only the 'membership' component of their 'spiritual well-being' construct, and not 'calling'¹⁴, showed significant correlations with actual performance measures. The authors speculate that, as far as work performance is concerned, 'membership' or team cohesiveness may be an "overriding factor" (p.268) for military personnel performance, eclipsing issues related to 'calling'. Fundamentally, Fry et al.'s (2011) study findings may be indirectly suggesting that the enhanced work performance seemingly brought about by spiritual well-being is contingent upon the nature of one's work.

¹² Petchsawang and Duchon's (2012) study was conducted in a food and baking company in Thailand.

¹³ Significant correlations were only shown between parts of their construct for spirituality in the workplace with parts of their construct for work performance, which seem to render their findings ambiguous.

¹⁴ The concept of 'spiritual well-being' in Fry et al.'s (2011) study consists of the constructs of 'membership' and 'calling'. These two constructs correspond closely to notions of spirituality in the workplace, that is, 'connection' and 'meaning' respectively.

In the preceding paragraphs, the literature review addressed the first of two questions posed to the studies in the area, asking *what* the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance may be. Next, I turn to the second question, which asks *how* and *why* spiritual well-being and work performance may be related.

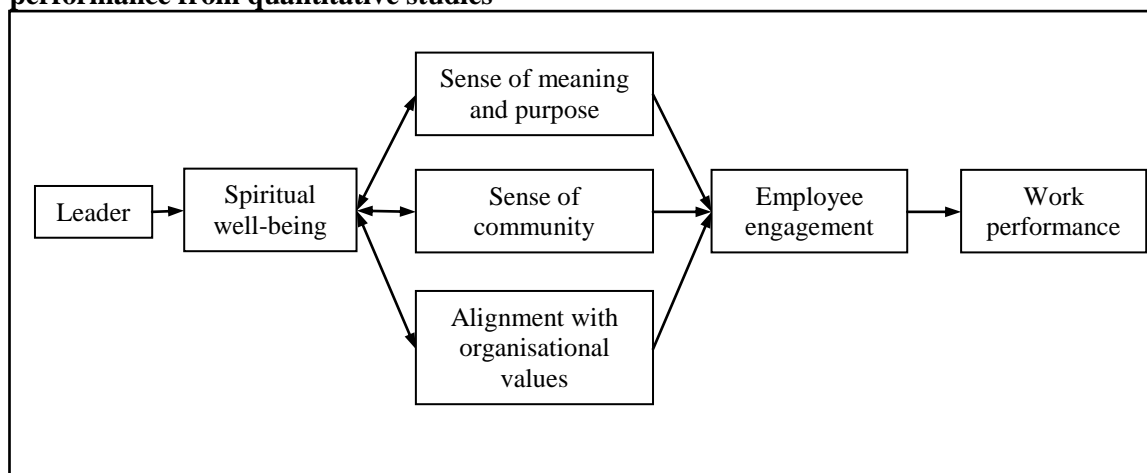
Before that, however, it seems pertinent to highlight another observation about the evidence furnished by quantitative studies. Although quantitative studies draw from statistical analyses to make links, the underlying philosophy of quantitative analysis is that the method does not prove a link. According to Punch (2005), statistical analyses provide evidence by concluding that a relation between variables cannot be disproved. This then raises additional questions about the findings of quantitative research in the area such as the influence of variables unknown and unrepresented therein. By their own admission, quantitative studies in the area acknowledge that additional variables not currently under study could possibly complicate their statistical links and findings (Fry et al., 2005; Milliman et al., 2003; Rego and Cunha, 2008).

Importantly, despite providing (numerical) evidence of a relation between variables under study, quantitative methods do not provide empirical evidence to explain the relation between them. As such, quantitative studies in the area are only able to establish *whether* a connection exists between spiritual well-being and work performance; they are not designed to empirically explain *how* they are connected (Duchon and Plowman, 2005). Thus, this review of *how* and *why* spiritual well-being and work performance may be related within quantitative studies in the area ought to be viewed with caution and tentativeness.

In general, quantitative studies posit that improved work performance is likely to be observed among workplaces that fosters spiritual well-being or accommodates spiritual notions in the workplace (Duchon and Plowman, 2005; Fry et al., 2011). A sense of spiritual well-being can be engendered in a variety of ways such as when employees experience a sense of meaning and purpose, a sense of community at work and an alignment with organisational values (Milliman et al., 2003; Rego and Cunha, 2008). These, in turn, can lead to higher levels of employee engagement and intrinsic motivation which may manifest in areas such as a commitment to and identification with organisational goals, job satisfaction and job involvement (Kolodinsky et al., 2008; Fry et al., 2005), all of which are assumed to lead to the enhancement of some aspect of work performance. Duchon and

Plowman (2005) and Fry et al., (2005, 2011), in particular, emphasise the possible role of the leader in fostering a spiritual atmosphere in the workplace. Figure 2.4 is a graphical representation of the crux of the just concluded theoretical arguments.

Figure 2.4: Theoretical arguments about the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance from quantitative studies



While the theoretical arguments contained in quantitative studies can seem problematic for those who adopt a less linear and mechanistic worldview of human nature and conduct, they nonetheless are able to supply knowledge about possible general trends between the concepts under study (Brandimarte, 2011). The review of quantitative studies thus far shows that there seems to be a general pattern linking spiritual well-being, positively in most cases, with attitudes and perceptions frequently associated with work performance. Fewer studies show a direct positive link between spiritual well-being and actual work performance. The literature review also revealed that the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance may be contingent upon the nature of one's work, its features and character. In order to develop a more nuanced understanding of how and why spiritual well-being and work performance may be related, qualitative studies in the area are examined next.

2.3.1.2 Qualitative studies

Notions of spirituality in the workplace, for example meaning and values, can occasionally be found in general organisational, business and management literature, though they are not necessarily located within the area of spirituality in the workplace. Some examples of

these studies that considered qualitative data include Collins (2001), Collins and Porras (1994), Peters and Waterman Jr. (1985) and Senge (2006). However, published empirical studies with qualitative data in the area that provide sufficient detail about their study methods are relatively fewer.

Six studies with qualitative data has been selected for the following review, with the aim of examining spiritual well-being with regard to work performance from a variety of work contexts and at different levels of organising. These six empirical studies can be categorised into two groups. The first group consists of Ashar and Lane-Maher (2004), Mitroff and Denton (1999a and 1999b) and Milliman et al. (1999). The two former studies provide the employees' perceptions on the subject while the latter study looks at the matter from an organisational level. The second group, Csikszentmihalyi (2004), Kinjerski and Skrypnik (2008) and Lewin and Regine (2001), seem to demonstrate how spiritual well-being may be related to traditional forms of success and real-world achievements. Table 2.2 provides an overview of these six studies and their study details relevant to the present analysis.

Not unlike quantitative studies in the area and the general appearance of a positive link between spiritual well-being and work performance, studies using qualitative data also seem to reveal similar findings. I pose the questions of what, how and why regarding the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance in tandem on the two groups of studies with qualitative data in the following review, starting with the first group of studies.

Some studies conclude that spiritual well-being, in addition to being widely relevant to most employees, are connected to work performance and success at the level of the individual employee. For instance, Mitroff and Denton's (1999a) interviews, conducted among human resource executives and managers as well as with senior executives from a range of businesses in the United States of America (USA), show that their participants view (1) spirituality to be an appropriate topic for the (American) workplace, and (2) spiritual well-being and work performance to be connected. According to Mitroff and Denton (1999a), there seems to be a desire among employees to want to fully express their spiritual inclinations while at work. Corresponding to that, participants in their study seem to be of the opinion that being ethical is compatible with being profitable in their business (Mitroff and Denton, 1999a).

Table 2.2: Selected studies using qualitative data – level of investigation, concepts and study participants

Year	Authors	Level of investigation	Concepts used to describe spirituality in the workplace or spiritual well-being	Concepts used to represent work performance	Description of study participants
1999 _{a,b}	Mitroff and Denton	Individual	Various notions including the ultimate source and provider of meaning; the awe in the presence of the transcendent, the sacredness of everything and the ordinariness of everyday life; the deep feeling of interconnectedness of everything; the ultimate end in itself.	Perceptions of organisational success.	14 senior executives in a United States of America (USA) East Coast manufacturing company known for its explicit stance on spirituality in the workplace; 18 persons who worked in a newly formed business alliance that promoted spirituality in the workplace; 13 senior managers and executives in a USA West Coast utility with traditional economic goals; 23 people from various organisations.
2004	Ashar and Lane-Maher	Individual and group	A sense of contribution to and participation in something purposeful, in something greater than one's ego and self-interest or for a greater good; a sense of accomplishment; cherishing relationships, care and connectedness; tending to the inner self and family; serving others, the professional and social community.	Perceptions of success.	49 mid- to top-level executives from a large, United States of America's federal government and law enforcement agency.
1999	Miliman et al.*	Organisational	An emphasis on building community; a sense of larger purpose; empowering employees including encouraging them to be themselves including their emotional selves; a strong work ethic tied to being part of a larger cause.	Organisational profitability; high employee and customer satisfaction levels.	Southwest Airlines*

Table 2.2: Selected studies using qualitative data – level of investigation, concepts and study participants (*continued from previous page*)

Year	Authors	Level of investigation	Concepts used to describe spirituality in the workplace or spiritual well-being	Concepts used to represent work performance	Description of sample participants
2001	Lewin and Regine	Individual, group and organisational	Work that reflects one's heart's desires and what one really cares about; passion, calling and work that is aligned with one's self - between what one believes in and what one does, between what one values and how one behaves; work that brings about greater good and that serves others.	Traditional bottom-line measures.	Nine successful businesses sampled from the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Germany and Australia.
2004	Csikszentmihalyi	Individual	The alignment of personal values with organisational goals; providing a product or service that benefits humankind and environment; improving employee connections; seeing the inter-connectedness in everything in the world; leaving behind a legacy.	Success as defined by the larger business and academic community.	39 business leaders identified as leaders who exemplify high achievement and strong moral commitments.
2008	Kinjerski and Skrypnek	Individual and group	A distinct state characterized by profound feelings of (i) well-being, (ii) a belief that one is engaged in meaningful work that makes a contribution and that involves a sense of connection to others and common purpose, and (iii) an awareness of a connection to something larger than oneself.	Improvement in the quality of care of care centre residents, and high achievement awards.	24 staff, consisting primarily of nursing assistants but also including licenced practical nurses, registered nurses and other (administrative, rehabilitation, physiotherapy, housekeeping, food services) personnel, at a long-term care centre in a western Canadian city.

*Note * secondary data analysis*

Ashar and Lane-Maher's (2004) study also reveal similar findings. They used a focus group method to attain perceptions of success among mid- to top-level executives from a law enforcement government agency. Despite supposedly providing ample opportunities to "discuss the materialistic, not the spiritual, side of life" (p.254), Ashar and Lane-Maher's (2004) participants discussed success in terms of a sense of accomplishment, balance, contribution to society and contribution to colleagues. Verbatim responses about success from their participants include "making the most of your potential", "(s)uccess is measured by contribution", and "(s)uccess is having an impact...affecting policies and procedures, helping other women and minorities" (pp. 255-256), and are contrasted with material success such as one's pay check, position and status in the organisation (Ashar and Lane-Maher, 2004).

Despite these perceptions, however, some participants were observed to have acted in ways that were inconsistent with their stated beliefs about notions of spiritual well-being and organisational performance. Mitroff and Denton (1999b), for instance, describe how one of their participants contradicted himself:

"(T)he chairman of a large, important organization in his industry bemoaned the fact that if he criticized the greed so rampant in corporate America, he would offend some of his biggest clients. This sharply contrasted with his earlier remarks in which he claimed that, as the chairman and founder of his organization, he was exempt from compromising his deepest values. When asked whether there was a contradiction in his responses, he was silent." (Mitroff and Denton, 1999b, p.86)

Additionally, Mitroff and Denton (1999a and 1999b) observe that while the participants in their study were comfortable bringing their intelligence to work, they seem less comfortable bringing to work their feelings or emotions, a position the authors suggest is less tenable for deriving deep meaning and purpose from work. These examples seem to indicate the possibility of conflicts between the employee's perception of spiritual well-being and reality. While echoing the general assumptions in the research area that employees yearn for spiritual well-being and believes in its influence on success at work, Mitroff and Denton's (1999a and 1999b) study also conveys the possible discord between notions of spiritual well-being with work contexts and with work performance for the individual leader or manager.

On the other hand, Milliman et al.'s (1999) case analysis of Southwest Airlines (SWA) possibly show a positive relation between spiritual well-being and work performance at the organisational level. Using a values-based model as a framework, Milliman et al. (1999) examined relevant literature to assess the ways and the degree to which SWA's organisational values, practices and business goals exemplify desired spiritual values. One of the conclusions Milliman et al. (1999) make is that "SWA's core values of a sense of community and cause directly relate to SWA's business strategy of offering low-cost air travel to customers who ordinarily couldn't afford to fly" (p.230). In their analysis of SWA, profitability seems to be premised on engaging the employees' heart and emotions, in addition to their minds.

Whether observed as an organisational value, conceived as a business plan or reflected in its human resource management practices, SWA, according to Milliman et al. (1999), expresses core values such as an emphasis on community, a sense of larger purpose, empowering employees to be themselves including their emotional selves, and strong work ethic that is largely tied to being part of a larger cause. Though the study is purely theoretical, in that only secondary data was used, Milliman's et al.'s (1999) analysis shows a very likely association between SWA's performance and profitability with its high employee and customer satisfaction levels, which seem to have been brought about by SWA's dedicated approach to spiritual well-being.

However, these three preceding studies can appear somewhat anecdotal or could be criticised as merely representing viewpoints of participants (as in Ashar and Lane-Maher, 2004), or researchers (as in Milliman et al., 1999) on the subject. Mitroff and Denton (1999a), for instance, are explicit on this point when they clarify that their data represent perceptions of their participants. Additionally, Mitroff and Denton's (1999a) interview questions seem to come across as particularly biased. For example, their participants were asked during the interview "if they agreed to the basic contention that long-term organizational success demanded that organizations learn how to foster spirituality in the workplace" (Mitroff and Denton, 1999a, p.34). However, the authors did not seem to have taken interview responses at face value but instead sought an elaboration from their participants on their interview responses.

Perceptions and anecdotes are nonetheless important data in social research, which according to Bryman and Bell (2011), form a possible basis for qualitative researchers to

make inferences about the study phenomenon. That said, it may be worth considering the above three studies' findings with other qualitative studies in the area. Thus, in order to gain deeper insights into the matter, I turn to the second group of qualitative studies.

Lewin and Regine's (2001) investigation into nine successful businesses across the globe, specifically in the USA, the United Kingdom, Germany and Australia, represents one of the three studies examined at this point. Unlike most studies selected for this literature review, Lewin and Regine (2001) had no initial intention to investigate spirituality or spiritual well-being in the workplace; the researchers intended to investigate the concept of complex adaptive systems¹⁵ among successful businesses, that is, businesses that met traditional bottom-line measures. Lewin and Regine's (2001) methodological approach was based on the use of narratives as a means to understanding the meaning of people's experience. Their primary method was interviews. Their study population, at times, include employees from every single level in the organisational hierarchy.

What Lewin and Regine (2001) found is that the organisations in their study tend to be very successful and very human-oriented at the same time. Specifically, the authors observe that the employees in their sample organisations storied "relationships [as] the bottom line of business, and that creativity, culture and productivity emerge from these interactions" (Lewin and Regine, 2001, p.45). What Lewin and Regine (2001) also infer from their participants' narratives is that these organisations are characterized by high levels of engagement of the whole person. In essence, Lewin and Regine (2001) conclude that the organisations in their study are successful because they are able to accommodate their employees' spiritual inclinations.

Lewin and Regine (2001) also explain the two ways in which their sample of organisations nurture high engagement levels of the whole person or engage their employees' spiritual strivings. The first is via personal deep work or passion. The authors refer to personal deep work as work that reflects one's heart's desires and what one really cares about; it is about passion, calling and finding work that is aligned with one's self. Lewin and Regine (2001) suggest that the alignment between what one believes in and what one does, between what one values and how one behaves, makes one more fully engaged at work. Hence, personal

¹⁵ According to Lewin and Regine, complex adaptive systems "are composed of a diversity of agents that interact with each other, mutually affect each other, and in so doing generate novel behavior for the system as a whole, such as in evolution, ecosystems, and the human mind" (p.6), and is an idea based on complexity science.

deep work is work that one finds truly meaningful, which in turn, will awaken one's "innate resourcefulness, intelligence [and] creativity" (Lewin and Regine, 2001, p.332).

The second way is via collective deep work. Lewin and Regine (2001) refer to collective deep work as a collection of employees that find their personal deep work to be in common with each other's, which mostly relates to work that brings about a greater good and to work which serves others. In this way, collective deep work gives rise to employee engagement, involvement and finally effectiveness (Lewin and Regine, 2001). Thus, employee engagement cultivated by personal and collective deep work seemed likely to have led to increased work performance in their sample organisations. Lewin and Regine's (2001) suggestions seem to resonate with theoretical arguments found within quantitative studies in the area in that their arguments emphasise meaning, community and alignment.

Similar to Lewin and Regine's (2001) study, Csikszentmihalyi's (2004) study also show that, in many ways, spiritual well-being seems related to success in a traditional sense. In Csikszentmihalyi's (2004) case, this argument is based on his interviews with a select group of thirty-nine business leaders: chief executive officers, presidents, founders or chairpersons of organisations, identified as leaders who exemplify high achievement and strong moral commitments. Notions of spirituality appear central to the way these successful business leaders conduct their lives at work. Csikszentmihalyi (2004) observes that personal vision and meaning in their jobs were strongly articulated throughout the interviews, and were frequently translated to the organisation's vision which in turn provided meaning and purpose for their organisations and employees.

Csikszentmihalyi (2004) provides explicit examples in his texts to buttress his claims. For instance, the author cites Yvon Chouinard, the founder of the outdoor clothing apparel company Patagonia, as saying that "[w]e are not in the business to make a profit...[but] to use business to find solutions to a lot of this environmental crisis" (Csikszentmihalyi, 2004, p.150). This led Patagonia to source for organically grown cotton¹⁶ and championing its use in the outdoor apparel industry. Like Yvon Chouinard, most of the leaders in his study, Csikszentmihalyi (2004) argue, believe that businesses exist for a larger, more worthwhile and meaningful purpose. In essence, the leaders in his study seem to be able to conduct "business that is good in both senses: the material and the spiritual" (p.4).

¹⁶ Cotton grown using traditional industrial means consumes a lot of pesticides and hence contributes to severe environmental degradation (Csikszentmihalyi, 2004).

Whether it is about providing a product or service that benefit humankind and environment, improving employee connections, seeing the interconnectedness of everything in the world or leaving behind a legacy, the leaders in Csikszentmihalyi's (2004) study show concern for a personal and deep relevance in their work beyond materialistic pursuits. Because they are able to express their spiritual strivings, these leaders are more fully engaged in the work, a strong intrinsic motivation that propels them to succeed at what they do (Csikszentmihalyi, 2004).

Interestingly, the successful business leaders in Csikszentmihalyi's (2004) study also seem to not distinguish between spiritual well-being in life generally and at work specifically. According to Csikszentmihalyi (2004), these leaders view work as an opportunity to be useful and responsible to the larger community, express a strong appreciation for life, demonstrate spiritual values such as trust, integrity, authenticity and empathy for people, tend to facilitate community and express interconnectedness with the world around them; some leaders even cite their religious faiths as their moral guide. Not surprisingly, these leaders also believe that having a good system of values, that is, living up to social obligations and good responsible behaviour, as complementing sound business practices and good long-term business results (Csikszentmihalyi, 2004).

But what Csikszentmihalyi (2004) concludes about the leaders in his study is perhaps to be expected. He sought out high-achieving leaders with strong moral commitments. And in so doing, the study sample would likely exemplify ways in which the spiritual and the material are made compatible. Thus, the interviews from his study *should* mostly be about the alignment of meaning, vision, values between the leaders and their work, and work achievements.

If we return to the example of Patagonia and its founder Yvon Chouinard, it is obvious that the organisation's mission to provide solutions for the environmental crisis is a mission that is close to Yvon Chouinard's heart. This mission is also presumably central to its strategic business position and responsible in some ways for its commercial success. If leaders, as Peters and Waterman Jr. (1985) suggest, are makers of meaning, it is natural to expect that the leaders' calling and ambition are to be indistinguishable from his or her ambition for the company. In a sense then, Yvon Chouinard's spiritual goal to address environmental problems is necessarily aligned with Patagonia's values and goals. As such, the study's specific contributions seem to be on how spiritual strivings can exist

harmoniously with the practical expectations of the business world for organisational leaders.

Even within a context where the alignment between spiritual needs and material goals are to be expected, misalignments can still be observed. Csikszentmihalyi (2004) highlights an incident of a leader in his study, previously a chief executive officer of a real-estate company, who parted ways with his company because he felt that his passion for providing educational opportunities for lower income neighbourhoods was hampered by his responsibilities in the company. Though detailed information regarding the particular leader's experiences on the matter is limited, it seems that spiritual and practical needs can move people down different career paths. It is also not clear from Csikszentmihalyi's (2004) writing the implications of the seeming lack of the alignment between this leader's and his organisation's values and goals on the individual and the organisation, and on their respective performance.

The review of studies with qualitative data thus far has included views either from the organisation as a whole (Milliman et al., 1999; Lewin and Regine, 2001) or from employees in a leadership or managerial role (Mitroff and Denton, 1999; Ashar and Lane-Maher, 2004; Csikszentmihalyi, 2004). The final study examined in this section focuses specifically on the perspectives of ground-level employees, that is, the non-leader and non-managerial group of employees within the organisational hierarchy. I am referring to Kinjerski and Skrypnek's (2008) study which include an assessment of the effectiveness of their 'Cultivating Spirit at Work in Long-Term Care' workshop on staff working in a care centre, the majority of which were in nursing roles. The aim of the workshop, consisting of a one day followed by an eight weekly one hour booster sessions, was to help participants find meaning and fulfilment in their work. After the workshop, Kinjerski and Skrypnek (2008) collected feedback from their participants via focus group discussions.

According to Kinjerski and Skrypnek (2008), the workshop seemed to have benefitted the participants in several ways. Participants cited personal growth and reported feeling happier and less burdened, at work and even at home. For instance, the participants reportedly experienced an improvement in team morale, enhancement in relationships and communication, and were more positive about their work. More pertinently, Kinjerski and Skrypnek (2008) note that their participants reported an increase focus on their care centre residents which seemed to have resulted also in a deeper understanding of their residents'

needs, a greater appreciation for the work they did and the difference they made to their residents' lives. Kinjerski and Skrypnik (2008) add that after the workshop, participants received accolades and top performance awards from their organisation and from the care home residents. Hence, an important observable and tangible outcome of the workshop seemed to have been the improved quality of care for the centre's residents.

The study demonstrates the possible positive influence of spiritual well-being on work performance although, as Kinjerski and Skrypnik (2008) caution, the study duration was too short to consider longer term influences. Furthermore, the care centre was selected for the workshop because it had issues of "poor morale, difficult staff relationships, and communication concerns" (Kinjerski and Skrypnik, 2008, p. 19). Thus, the issue that the workshop attended to was perhaps more in terms of resolving problems or restoring normal work performance rather than enhancing it. Despite these circumstances, the insights the study provides on spiritual well-being and work performance still seem pertinent.

First, the study adds insights into the possible motivational influences of spiritual well-being on one's work at the individual level. Kinjerski and Skrypnik (2008) posit that meaningful work and an appreciation for one's contributions are key dimensions to enhancing spiritual well-being, in their case, in long-term care. They enable employees to see their work as rewarding, which in turn "changes one's views of work and positively affects how the work is done and perceived" (p. 24). Their arguments show how employee engagement from the individual level point of view is based on the gratification and satisfaction one receives from the work they do, perhaps on top of being part of a like-minded community and being aligned with organisational values and goals.

The second insight the study provides is the contextual clarity of what one does and how well one does with regard to spiritual well-being. Consider earlier cited examples such as Patagonia's goal to help solve the world's environmental crisis (see Csikszentmihalyi's [2004] study) or SWA's organisational goal to make flying more affordable (see Milliman et al.'s [1999] study). One could ask in what way does spiritual well-being in these instances relate to ground-level employees and their work they do daily, including how well they do it, for instance, for the financial accountant and his or her task of collating financial data in Patagonia or the customer service staff and his or her job processing customer tickets at SWA. It does not seem immediately obvious from these earlier studies.

On the other hand, the individual level of the meaningfulness of work or the difference employees make seems more visible and tangible in Kinjerski and Skrypnek's (2008) study. In the case of staff at long-term care centres, whether and to what extent they 'make a difference' seems directly dependent on the actual work they do and the quality of their work. In a sense, doing their job well becomes meaningful, spiritual, and at the same time, leads to improving the quality of care for centre residents. This seems to be an important aspect of work performance for a care centre. If this is so, work performance, with regard to spiritual well-being, can be argued to be a result of the "alignment between one's values, beliefs, and work, and of engaging in work that has a higher purpose and is meaningful" (Kinjerski and Skrypnek, 2004, p.32).

The theoretical arguments regarding the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance in studies with qualitative data seem to provide additional empirical basis for the general arguments found in studies with quantitative data. They also seem to contribute crucial insights into the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance. One especially significant aspect of their arguments seems to revolve around the issue of alignment.

2.3.1.3 Alignment and work performance

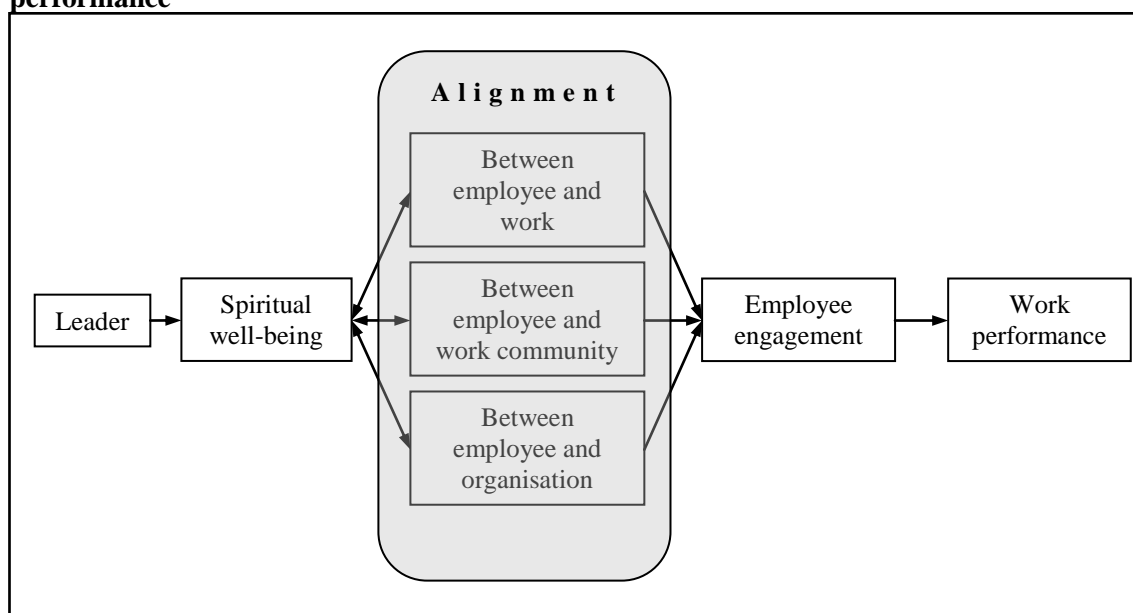
Upon closer scrutiny and prompted by the review of studies using qualitative data, the issue of alignment seems to emerge across many theoretical arguments in the literature regarding the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance. For instance, the quantitative studies discussed above, e.g. Rego and Cunha (2008), Kolodinsky (2008) and Milliman et al. (2003), include the dimension 'alignment of employees with organisational values' in their construct of spirituality in the workplace. Fry et al. (2011) argues that performance is brought about by "value congruence" (p.269), a term that seems to refer to the alignment between members of an organisation on the need for spiritual well-being. Conceptual studies in the area also seem to make similar arguments. For instance, Jurkiewicz and Giacalone (2004) propose that spiritual organisations nurture the whole person by enabling their employees' personal and professional values to integrate, which in turn fosters greater work performance. Pfeffer (2003) sums up the issue of alignment succinctly when he suggests that people value work that enables them "to live and work in an integrated fashion" (p.32).

In relation to other studies, Kinjerski and Skrypnek's (2004) study provides a fairly in-depth description of what the issue of alignment may be. In the course of describing what the experience of spirituality at work may be, participants in their study explain alignment as the "congruity between one's values and beliefs and one's work" (Kinjerski and Skrypnek, 2004, p.34) that brings about a greater good. It also means that one's values and beliefs about the larger purpose of work are congruent with one's work community and the organisation one works for. Following Kinjerski and Skrypnek's (2004) study, the issue of alignment, with regard to spiritual well-being, appears to refer to three areas, that is, between:

- 1) the employees' spiritual inclinations and their *work*,
- 2) the employees' spiritual inclinations and their *team members*, and
- 3) the employees' spiritual inclinations and their *organisation*.

The issue of alignment in these three areas seem to coincide with theoretical arguments in the literature about employee engagement with regard to spiritual well-being. Specifically, each of the three areas corresponds closely to 'a sense of meaning and purpose', 'a sense of community', and the 'alignment between employee and organisational values' (see Figure 2.4). Thus, theoretical arguments in the area can be reframed in terms of alignment, as in Figure 2.5.

Figure 2.5: Theoretical arguments about the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance



The ubiquity of the issue of alignment across most of the studies examined in this literature review is intriguing. Perhaps its ubiquity merely reflects the affirmative stance adopted by studies in the area or by participants in these studies; most of the reviewed studies only demonstrate contexts where spiritual well-being and work performance are positively connected or perspectives that support this positive connection. In this case, these studies generally convey ideal situations and as such foreground circumstances where the integration between employees' spiritual inclinations and their work is most likely to be harmonious and unproblematic and would likely lead to enhanced work performance.

Nevertheless, the issue of alignment in practice may be problematic on two fronts. Firstly, these studies generally privilege organisational goals over employees' values and purposes of work. Most of the arguments imply that it is up to employees to align their values and purpose with the organisation's goals. For example, Harrington et al. (2001) conclude their study by suggesting "that the more congruent employees' values and spiritual inclinations are with the organization, then the greater the possibility that employees will find true meaning at work" (p.162).

This idea seems premised on assumptions that are inapplicable in many instances. It assumes that all organisations and their goals have a spiritual aspect and that the employee's failure to align to the organisation's goals might mean less meaning at work and perhaps even substandard work performance. It also accords the absolute power to organisations and their leaders to determine what their employees' spiritual inclinations should be. According to Csikszentmihalyi (2004), such assumptions may lead to fear that the concept of spirituality in the workplace will be adopted merely as a strategy to improve organisational performance. The idea also assumes that employees meet their spiritual strivings at work only through their organisations goals and objectives, which is perhaps true only for a segment of employees. Yet, such ideas display an overly authoritarian, presumptive and prescriptive undertone, especially in the era of knowledge work (Nolan, 2007).

Secondly, assumptions about the issue of alignment may oversimplify or mask work realities. Work performance, at the level of the organisation, team or the individual employee, is probably and in part the influence of many inclinations, spiritual as well as a-spiritual ones. For instance, employees can be generally assumed to also aspire for bigger pay checks and for promotions while simultaneously seeking deeper meaning in their

careers. Private hospitals and healthcare practitioners may aspire to restore health and provide healthcare to their patients while pursuing high profitability targets. And while the alignment of spiritual inclinations at work may well play a crucial role in enhancing work performance, research in the area seem less informed about the parallel influences of spiritual misalignments brought about by, what might be a likelihood of, a-spiritual inclinations.

Thus, research on spiritual well-being and work performance may need to investigate the intersection between the ideal and the less ideal, that is, between the alignment of the employee's spiritual inclinations in the domain of work and conflict of the same.

2.4 Criticisms of spirituality in the workplace research

While proponents may find ideas surrounding the concept of spirituality in the workplace humanistic and appealing to their senses of what work should be like, research in the area is not without its critics. In this section, some criticisms of the area relevant to this research are examined.

The first is that there is not much empirical evidence, in Brown's (2003) and Polley et al.'s (2005) views, to support the association of spiritual well-being and the increase in work performance. Although there has been, since 2005, more studies published on the subject, their assessment seems valid until recently if we consider the quantitative studies on the subject and their potential limitations (see section 2.3.1). Conclusions based largely on assertions and baseless optimism, Brown (2003) elaborates, is not helpful particularly when current discourses largely treat spiritual well-being as a general panacea for managerial and organisational failures.

Additionally, Case and Gosling (2010) argue that some research in the area appear to merely exploit the possible 'performative' benefits of fostering spiritual well-being in the workplace, persisting in using positivist methods that are incommensurable to what might be an ephemeral and multi-faceted phenomenon. These studies, Case and Gosling (2010) criticise, tend to be influenced by and to "reinforce and satisfy the appetites of extant capitalist discourse" (p.261). Although spirituality in the workplace studies examining work performance using qualitative data may face similar criticisms, their investigative

intent and remit is generally broader. As such, research on spiritual well-being and work performance might be more appropriately advanced with qualitative empirical insights.

According to MacDonald (2011), current studies also tend to view spirituality, and by extension spiritual well-being, solely in positive light for organisations. As it stands, this can lead to many knowledge gaps. Polley et al. (2005) pose an insightful question, asking whether organisations that employ a spiritual stance lack a competitive edge in contrast to other spiritually-unhindered and fiercely competitive counterparts. If the answer to Polley et al.'s (2005) hypothetical question is 'it depends', research ought to next shed light onto the circumstances where it lacks a competitive edge and where it does not. The trend of adopting positivistic empirical approaches to the exclusion of non-positivistic approaches (Dean, 2004) in particular seems to hamper efforts to gain a more balanced appreciation of the possible influences of spirituality on organisations, their employees and performance.

Also, the idea of nurturing spirituality in the workplace, according to Lips-Wiersma et al. (2009) can exist as a form of control and as a means of exploitation. Critics cite two ways this can happen. First, employees could be expected to be more productive (D. Tourish and N. Tourish, 2010) without being fairly compensated (Polley et al., 2005). Furthermore, the damage of being invested so fully at work can be devastating for the employee when and if immediate organisational priorities prevail over more personal spiritual ones. Second, spiritual organisations seek employees to align their values with the companies' and not vice versa which, D. Tourish and N. Tourish (2010) assert, is an act of coercion rather than engagement. Correspondingly, Driver (2007) argues that for meaning to be meaningful, it should not be prescribed by companies to their employees because they need to discover it for themselves. And according to Lips-Wierma et al. (2009), when the majority of studies do not consider the power, conflicted, control and instrumentality structures of organisations, it would likely result in an oversight that causes studies in the area to come across as harbouring hegemonic intentions.

However, employees may not be as gullible or naive as to think that management leaders are infallible or morally unquestionable, as assumed in the above criticism. As Polley et al. (2005) themselves argue, the Enron and Worldcom scandals, and incidences of unjustifiably high chief executive compensation and benefits packages serve to effect more scepticism rather than blind acceptance of managerial intentions. To then suggest instrumental impositions without an equal appreciation of agency and resistance among

employees is perhaps to only hear half the story. Still, the point of the potential hegemony, instrumentality and exploitation that exist in a typical organisational context deserves attention since they can potentially transform ideas of the positive relation between spiritual well-being and work performance into merely serving as a means to a corporate end.

Some of the critics, perhaps in their zeal to redress the charges of the instrumentality and hegemony implicit in the current spirituality in the workplace scholarship and practice, themselves appear to exact a similar kind of hegemony. For instance, D. Tourish and N. Tourish's (2010) propose that "the workplace is *not* a useful medium for people to find the deepest meaning in their lives" and that "business organizations are *not* a suitable forum for exploring such issues" (p.219) [emphases added]. Without considering the employees' voice on the matter, particularly ones not in a leadership or managerial position, it might be premature to dismiss the possible significance and desirability of spiritual well-being in others' experience of work. D. Tourish and N. Tourish's (2010) insistence on the matter, it seems, also represents a form of imposition not unlike that presumably perpetrated by current research.

This is however not an excuse to ignore the possible incompatibilities of ideas regarding spiritual well-being within organisational settings, particularly in relation to the self-serving goal of businesses. For instance, Lips-Wiersma et al. (2009) argue that "(f)irms by design are instrumental, goal-driven entities with a clear focus on ends" (p.292). For commercial firms, its profitability or bottom line represents one such end. This view of organisations has some legal basis. According to Bakan (2005), a corporation's ultimate goal is to increase shareholder value. Every decision that a corporation makes, even the philanthropic ones, must relate to improving bottom-line profits. Decisions other than those that benefit the shareholders financially could be open to legal challenge (Bakan, 2005). Because of such incompatibilities, D. Tourish and N. Tourish (2010) suggest, current research on spirituality in the workplace ought to also question the agenda of the organisation.

Perhaps a lot of the criticisms stem from research privileging the leaders' or managers' perspectives and experience on the subject over ground-level employees' perspectives and experience. For instance, D. Tourish and N. Tourish (2010) are of the opinion that the area is largely driven by organisational leaders and their need to drive the organisation's

performance. Ground-level employees' views on the matter, in Lips-Wiersma et al.'s (2009) assessment, tend to be apprehended largely with positivistic methods, such as with survey instruments and tend to focus solely on positive implications. This assessment seems consistent with the preceding literature review (see Section 2.3.1). Consequently, it may be worthwhile for future empirical studies to examine the perspectives and experience of ground-level employees and to shed light on circumstances where compatibility as well as conflict exists. In so doing, studies in the area may begin to address some of these criticisms and, at the same time, expand and extend research's understanding of spiritual well-being and its implications for organisations and their employees, both positive and negative.

2.5 Concluding remarks

This chapter began with an examination of the concept of spirituality in the workplace and its definitions within relevant literature, including what spiritual well-being might be. Despite the possibility of conceptual disparateness, the concept of spirituality in the workplace can possibly be understood as five inter-related notions commonly associated with it. These notions accentuate the need to understand the concept at the level of the individual, as an experience and as a way of being that encompasses cognitive as well as affective aspects. This chapter has also examined work performance with regard to spiritual well-being, explored the empirical evidence on the subject and reviewed theoretical arguments therein. The current understanding of the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance has mostly emphasised the positive and has been argued as the result of the alignment between employees and their work, work community and organisation. Important conflicting issues and gaps, however, remained unexamined. Further empirical investigation, especially on the ground-level employees' perspectives and experience, seems warranted if research is to gain deeper insights on the subject.

Chapter 3 Scope of research

This chapter begins with a consolidation of some of the potential gaps in the literature regarding the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance. After that, the focus for this research is made explicit, followed by the construction and explanation of the conceptual framework, research purposes and research questions. The latter part of the chapter relates to the research site and the research's participants. After justifying the choice of and describing the research site, the chapter examines some of the work contexts that may shape the research participants' work experiences with regard to spiritual well-being and work performance.

3.1 Gaps in knowledge and research focus

Drawing from the review of the literature in Chapter 2, there are four identifiable gaps in knowledge that this research will attempt to address. These four gaps, in turn, frame the focus of this research.

The first gap relates to how current knowledge in the area seem to largely privilege the organisations' point of view, especially those of its leaders and managers, as opposed to the views of *ground-level employees*. Studies that include the views of ground-level employees are located mostly in survey-statistical approaches which tend to seek 'average' views rather than the nuances or the possible aberrations and disparities in the participants' experiences that may also offer pertinent insights on the matter. In short, current knowledge of the ground-level employees' experience with regard to spiritual well-being and work performance comes across more cursory than comprehensive. Hence, it seems particularly beneficial for this research to investigate the work experiences of ground-level employees.

Investigating the experiences of ground-level employees in this research is perhaps significant in two respects. Firstly, the ground-level employees' experience of work can differ substantially in many ways from the leaders' experience. For example, leaders or employees at higher hierarchical positions in organisations can generally be viewed as having more autonomy in their jobs. By that reasoning, leaders are more in control of a number of things, for instance, shaping their work in ways that are deemed to be

meaningful to them. Csikszentmihalyi (2004) makes an important point. He observes that the leaders in his study were able to consider the more spiritual aspects of their work perhaps because they have “made their millions” (p.82).

Contrastingly, ground-level employees may generally lack the autonomy or flexibility to craft their work as leaders perhaps do. As opposed to, for instance, creating a vision for their organisations as leaders are expected to (Csikszentmihalyi, 2004; Peters and Waterman Jr., 2003), ground-level employees are generally prescribed specific work goals. These work goals, sometimes known as key performance indices or targets, must be met regardless of whether the work goals are compatible or not with the ground-level employees’ spiritual inclinations. Thus, the difference in work contexts between leaders and ground-level employees is likely to engender different work experiences. As such, current knowledge, since it predominantly emphasises the leader’s point of view, is unlikely to adequately reflect the ground-level employee’s experiences. Thus, supplementing studies in the area with voices of ground-level employees represents a worthwhile attempt to complement current knowledge in the area, contributing to what might be more holistic viewpoints. It may also remedy the lopsided and hegemonic views that critics argue current studies cast on the matter.

Secondly, there is a notable shift in the nature of work that may result in an increase in organisational emphasis on ground-level employees. This is perhaps due to the advent of, what Drucker (1999) refers to as, knowledge-based economies. Work is increasingly more knowledge-based wherein the outcome of work is less in the form of a (physical) product or service per se but rather in the form of knowledge held by the organisations’ employees. In such a scenario, ground-level employees are likely to be given more autonomy in their work. This is what Seddon (2003) and Pink (2010) describe as the increased delegation of responsibilities and decision-making authority (away from leaders) to ground-level employees. According to Dehler and Welsh (2003), this shift in the nature of work also accentuates the connection between employees and their work, triggering a deeper investment in work including the need to seek larger and deeper purpose while at work.

Correspondingly, the nature of the worker is possibly also evolving alongside this shift in the nature of work. This is because more employees, according to Zohar and Marshall (2004), are looking towards satisfying their higher levels of needs such as their self-actualisation needs, alongside a rise in incomes and standards of living. Again, these

changes are likely to be more prominent for ground-level employees. Thus, ground-level employees may increasingly be seeking more from their work above and beyond a salary or financial security, conceivably in terms of a deeper connection and purpose at work (Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003). Hence, the idea of spiritual well-being may be increasingly pertinent to ground-level employees. Additionally, the value of the voices of ground-level employees in spirituality in the workplace research seems evident when we consider that they make up, what may be assumed to be, the numerical majority in a typical organisation. As such, the evolving nature of work and the worker are likely to indicate the need for research in the area to investigate the experiences of ground-level employees.

This research's specific interest in the experiences of ground-level employees has significant bearings on the issue of alignment posited by theoretical arguments about the (positive) relation between spiritual well-being and work performance. Although there are three areas of alignment highlighted in theoretical arguments within the literature (see Section 2.3.1.3), this research gives special attention to one area, namely, the alignment between employees and their work. There are two reasons for doing so. The first reason is based on the way some research participants describe what is meaningful to them about their work. Consider, for instance, Kinjerski and Skrypnek's (2004) study on the definition of spiritual well-being among professionals involved with researching or promoting the idea, especially the way their participants refer to the issue of alignment [emphases added to original texts]:

“This alignment allows me to bring my whole self to work and pursue *work* that is meaningful to who I am.” (p.34)

“This is my life's *work*. I cannot not be doing *this*. *It* has found me as much as I have found *it*.” (p.34)

“I'm doing this because I believe in the *work* I'm doing and that *it* will make a difference...” (p.35)

“I felt my *work* with the organization was contributing to an enterprise much larger than all of us.” (p.35)

Based on Kinjerski and Skrypnek's (2004) participants' responses, individuals align themselves primarily with the *work* they are doing; their alignment with their organisation and with their work community seems to bear lesser significance than their alignment with their work. What this perhaps indicates is that the alignment between employees and their work may be a more pertinent focus for this research, if the individual ground-level

employees' experience is sought. Brown's (2003) opinions reflect my reading of the above excerpts when he comments that employees would most likely "give their heart and soul... to their work activities than to their employer or to the organization" (p.397). Other studies in the area also seem to concur. Lips-Wiersma (2002) found meaningful work to transcend organisational goals, noting that employees move to another organisation or make career changes so long as they can pursue the *work* they are doing.

The second reason why the alignment between employees and their work may deserve special attention in this research is that the other two areas of alignment (alignment between the employees and work communities, and between employees and their organisations) may closely reflect perspectives of leaders or their position in the organisation. This is problematic because the leaders' job may include promoting the organisation's values with the aim of fostering some degree of alignment between their employees and the organisation. Additionally, as the person responsible for creating the company's vision (Peters and Waterman Jr., 2003), leaders are probably already (or even necessarily) aligned with the values, vision and purpose of their organisations. As such, being aligned with one's work, work community and organisation is likely to be internalised within and championed by leaders, though this may be less the case for ground-level employees. Nevertheless, instead of disregarding the possible insights from investigating the alignment in these two other areas, they will take subordinate priority in this research (this issue will be further clarified in Section 3.2).

The second gap relates to the mostly positive outlook or affirmative stance observed in the literature with regard to spiritual well-being and work performance (Lips-Wiersma et al., 2009; D. Tourish and N. Tourish, 2010). In close association with this positive outlook are theoretical arguments that generally posit an alignment between employees and their work, their work community and their organisations. Circumstances that are less desirable, more negative or outright contradictory to ideas surrounding spirituality in the workplace, including ones that are detrimental to work performance, seem unexamined in empirical research. It is thus possible that misalignments or conflicts that arise from attending to one's spiritual inclinations in the domain of work generally escape scrutiny.

Based on this gap, this research will attempt to investigate the *interface* between employees and their work rather than to merely investigate ways employees may be aligned with their work. This is because, while the issue of alignment may in part play a

role, the influences of spirituality on work performance may be due to influences other than the alignment of employees' and their work. According to Oxford University Press (2015), the term interface is defined as a "point where two systems, subjects, organizations, etc. meet and interact". By examining the *point* where employees and their work *meet and interact*, this research investigates all possible ways employees and their work interface and not merely how they may be aligned. In essence, what this means is that the research focuses on investigating the spectrum of experiences ground-level employees may relate to about their spiritual inclinations or spiritual well-being in the domain of work, from alignments to conflicts.

Thus far, this research has identified two of its main focus: (1) the experiences of ground-level employees and (2) the interface between employees and their work. As such, it is useful at this point to define more clearly what this research means by the term 'work' in 'the interface between employees and their work'. The term is perhaps nebulous a concept as it may refer to many, if not all, areas of one's job. Within this research's specific interest on work performance, the scope of work which seems particularly pertinent is *work targets*. *Work targets* can be defined as key objective indices employees are expected to meet, which are typically prescribed by organisations. This research assumes that employees demonstrate work performance when they meet their *work targets*.

It is also useful to be explicit about what aspects of the 'employee' are to be investigated in 'the interface between employees and their work'. Despite suggesting that spiritual well-being can be attained from meeting the needs of five notions, what might perhaps be more conceptually and practically relevant for this research is to focus on the notion of *meaning*. There are four ways this strategy may be defended. Firstly, meaningful work seems to be a central notion of spirituality in the workplace (see Section 2.1.2). Secondly, if all five notions are inter-related as suggested in the literature review, then examining meaningfulness of work may eventually entail an examination of the other four notions of spirituality in the workplace albeit less directly. Thirdly, there is precedent for using the notion of meaning to study spirituality in the workplace. Mitroff and Denton (1999a), for instance, initiated interview discussions around meaning and purpose "as a natural bridge to the more general topic of spirituality" (p. 85). These three arguments suggest that the concept of spiritual well-being can be accessed via the notion of meaning.

The fourth argument is that, by using the notion of meaning as a natural bridge to spirituality, this research avoids the possible ambiguity participants may have concerning the term spirituality, for instance, confusing it with carrying exclusive religious connotations. This is, however, not to suggest that the term meaning or meaningful work does not carry any ambiguities; it is, by comparison, arguably less ambiguous than the term spirituality. Thus, this research investigates the interface between employees and their work by specifically investigating the interface between the employees' *inclination for meaningfulness* and their need to meet their *work targets*.

The third gap in knowledge relates to the generally inadequate *contextual* clarity regarding the posited relations between spiritual well-being and work performance. The literature review in Chapter 2 shows that the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance may be contingent upon the inherent features or character of one's work. It is then perhaps significant for this research to also investigate the influence of contexts at work on the employees' experience of work. The research's interest on contextual clarity also indicates the need to examine the locally-situated account of the employee's experience, specifically of the interface between spiritual inclinations and the need to meet work targets. The significance of seeking contextual clarity is that it may enable this research to better anchor and situate its findings.

The fourth and final gap in knowledge pertains to ideas of work performance. Even if *actual* work performance is examined in current studies, they do not necessarily distinguish between *good* and mediocre or poor performance. This, in turn, may distort our understanding of empirical evidence generated therein. There are perhaps many reasons why people do a job really well and equally as many reasons why people perform poorly at work. Resolving issues of poor work performance does not automatically result in *good* performance – it merely restores performance to normal levels. McGregor (1985) clarifies this when he says “that there is no direct correlation between employee satisfaction and productivity...industrial health does not flow directly from the elimination of dissatisfaction” (p.46). As such, contexts that generate *good* versus moderate or poor performance are likely to differ. Thus, this research sets out to understand success and excellence rather than failure and mediocrity by investigating *good* and *actual* work performances, adopting the approaches of Lewin and Regine's (2001) and Csikszentmihalyi's (2004) studies.

Table 3.1 is a summary of the four gaps identified from the literature and this research's corresponding investigative focus.

Table 3.1: Gaps in knowledge and corresponding research focus

	Identifiable gap in knowledge	Focus of this research
1	A large portion of current studies privilege the organisation's point of view, including that of its leaders, to the general exclusion of detailed and comprehensive views from ground-level employees.	Investigates the experiences of <i>ground-level employees</i> in a more comprehensive manner. Specifically investigates the area of alignment between the ground-level employee and his or her work.
2	Current studies tend to adopt a positive outlook or affirmative stance. Thus, theoretical arguments relating to spiritual well-being with regard to work performance seem to revolve solely around the issue of alignment.	Investigates the ground-level employee's experience of the <i>interface</i> , instead of merely the alignment, between them and their work. Specifically the focus is on the interface between the employee's <i>inclination for meaningfulness</i> and the need to meet <i>work targets</i> .
3	Contextual clarity surrounding the posited (positive) relation between spiritual well-being and work performance in current studies seems inadequate.	Investigates the influence of <i>work contexts</i> on the ground-level employees' experience of work, specifically with regard to the interface between inclination for meaningfulness and work targets.
4	Some studies do not distinguish between good, mediocre and poor work performance.	Investigates the experiences of ground-level employees that demonstrate good, as opposed to mediocre or poor, work performance.

Following the identification of the gaps in knowledge and the framing of the research focus, the next section describes the construction of this research's conceptual framework.

3.2 Conceptual framework

According to Maxwell (1996), the conceptual framework is “a formulation of what you think is *going on* with the phenomena you're studying – a tentative *theory* of what is happening and why” (p.25). Similarly, Miles and Huberman (1994) view the conceptual framework as “the current version of the researcher's map of the territory being investigated” (p.20) and represents ideas that help orient the research. In the following paragraphs, this research's tentative theory of the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance is presented. The main elements selected as part of the conceptual

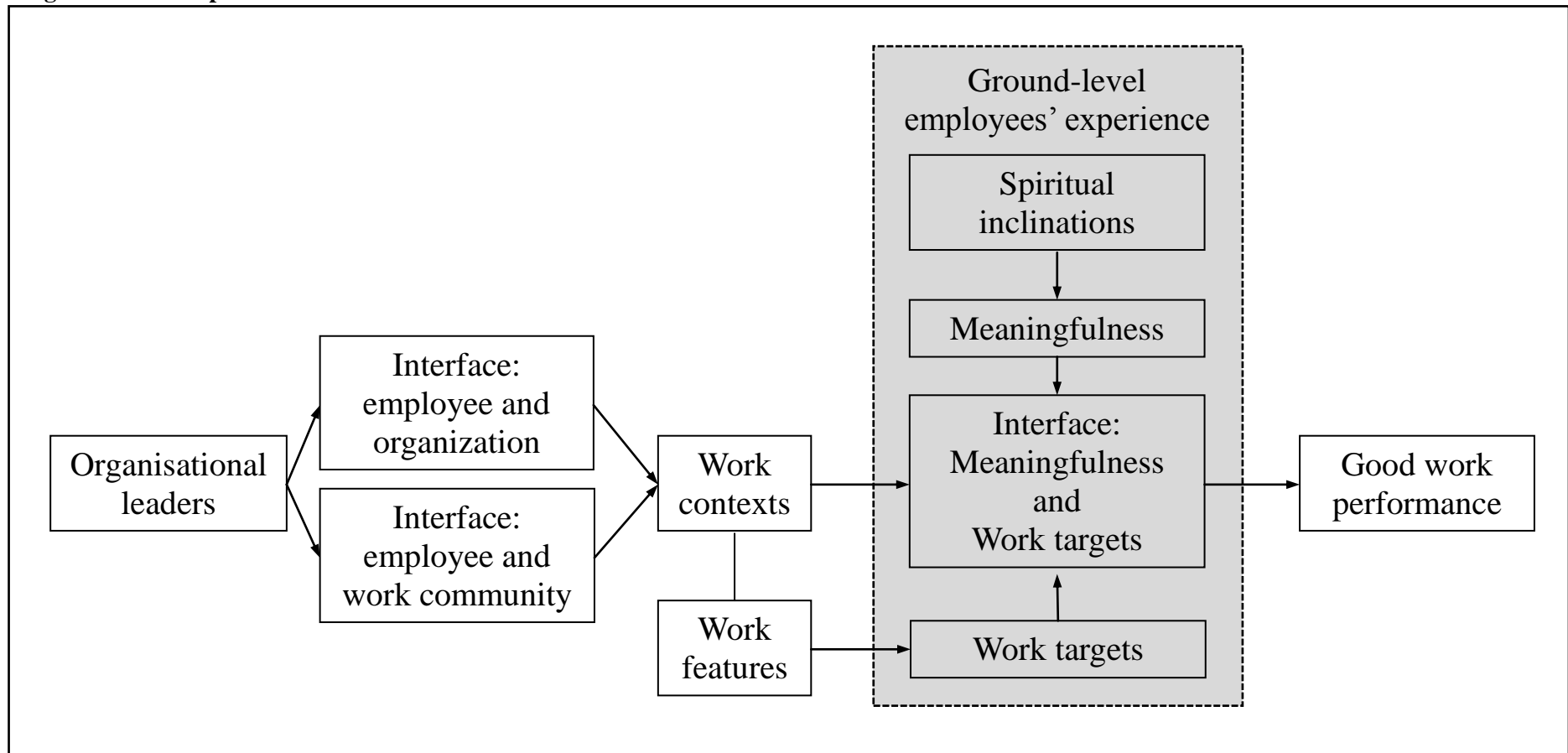
framework and the relationships among them are drawn from two related sources. They are: (1) the review of the extant literature in the area and the theoretical arguments that emerged therein, which are discussed in Chapter 2, and (2) the identified gaps in knowledge in the area and the research focus, which are discussed in Section 3.1.

Graphical depictions of the conceptual framework, according to Miles and Huberman (1994), represent one useful way to draft a conceptual framework. This research's conceptual framework went through much iteration and was the outcome of the on-going examination of the literature and the process of designing the research, including the research questions, the paradigm of inquiry, the research methodology and methods. The resulting conceptual framework is depicted graphically in Figure 3.1. Main elements are represented by rectangular boxes. Single-directional arrows indicate one-way influence or relationships between the selected elements. (Non-arrow) Lines between the elements indicate affiliation. The grey-shaded box with dotted lines in Figure 3.1 indicates the central focus of this research.

This paragraph describes the central focus of the research. It relates to the experience of the interface between ground-level employees, their spiritual inclinations, and their work. This can be reframed as the *interface* between inclination for *meaningfulness* and the need to meet *work targets* for ground-level employees. The relationship between these elements are represented by single-directional arrows from 'Spiritual inclinations' to 'Meaningfulness', and from 'Meaningfulness' and 'Work targets' to the 'Interface between Meaningfulness and Work targets'. The interface between meaningfulness and work targets, in turn, is conceptualised to lead to work performance and thus is represented by a single-directional arrow from the 'Interface between Meaningfulness and Work targets' to 'Good work performance'.

This paragraph describes the main elements outside the central focus of the research (outside the grey-shaded box in Figure 3.1). It is theorised in the literature that the alignment between employees and their work community and the alignment between employees and their organisations potentially increases employee engagement, which in turn leads to an increase in work performance (see Figure 2.5). In the conceptual framework, these two areas are conceptualised as part of the work contexts that may influence the ground-level employee's experience of the interface between their inclination for meaningfulness and work targets.

Figure 3.1: Conceptual framework



Literature also suggests that the alignment between employees and their work community and organisation to be influenced by organisational leaders, hence the single-directional arrows from 'Organisational leaders' to 'Interface between employees and work community' as well as to 'Interface between employees and organisation', through to 'Work contexts'.

The literature review also alluded to the possibility of work performance, with regard to spirituality in the workplace, to be contingent upon the features and character of one's work (see Section 2.3.1.1). Thus, 'Work features' is conceptualised to be related to 'Work contexts' and to influence 'Work targets', represented respectively by a (non-arrow) line and a single-directional arrow.

3.3 Research purpose and Research questions

The research purpose will presently be stated and following that, the research questions. Maxwell (1996) explains that research purposes are focused on understanding something. Thus, the research purpose is to understand the possible relations between spiritual well-being and work performance. This research also seeks to understand the ground-level employees' experience of work, specifically how inclination for meaningfulness and the need to deliver on work targets interface. In a sense, this research seeks to apprehend how ground-level employees experience their work, for instance, whether and to what extent they negotiate ways to meet or reconcile their spiritual inclinations and work targets.

Thus, the central research questions are:

1. In the ground-level employee's experience, what is the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance?
2. In the ground-level employee's experience, how does the inclination for meaningfulness and the need to deliver work targets interface?

According to Andrews (2003), ancillary research questions assist in answering the research's central research questions. The ancillary research questions, with regard to the ground-level employee's experience of work, are:

1. How does the inclination for meaningfulness influence the need to deliver work targets?
2. How does the need to deliver work targets influence the inclination for meaningfulness?
3. How is the interface between the inclination for meaningfulness and the need to deliver work targets influenced by work contexts and work features?

The first and second central research questions are related. Understanding how ground-level employees experience the interface between their spiritual inclinations and their work (second central research question) would contribute to deeper insights into the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance (first central research question). In a way, the second central research question seeks to expand on theoretical insights regarding the possible relations between spiritual well-being and work performance by focusing on the interface between the inclination for meaningfulness and the need to meet work targets.

The ancillary research questions focus on the possible influences and counter-influences on the interface between the inclination for meaningfulness and the need to meet work targets for the ground-level employee. They also focus on investigating the contexts and features of the ground-level employee's work and how these may influence the ways spiritual inclinations and work targets interface.

Thus far, the possible gaps in knowledge have been identified, the research focus stated, the conceptual framework presented, and the research purpose and research questions formulated. In the next section, issues related to the research site as well as aspects of the research site that may be pertinent to the elements depicted in the conceptual framework are discussed.

3.4 Rationale for research site

The research site selected for this research is the healthcare sales industry in Malaysia. Three issues regarding this research site are addressed in the following paragraphs, namely: (1) the reasons for selecting the healthcare sales industry as a research site, (2) the reasons for conducting the research in Malaysia, and (3) the suitability of healthcare sales representatives as research participants.

As a research site, the healthcare sales industry is likely to provide two features of work that is pertinent for this research. The first feature relates to the social values commonly assumed to be associated with ‘healthcare’. By and large, the work in the healthcare sales industry relates to the provision of health-related solutions such as in improving healthcare outcomes for patients, evident from the mission and vision statements of healthcare sales companies. For example, Eli Lilly and Company, an international research-based pharmaceutical company, cites in its webpage that the company envisions “help(ing) patients live longer, healthier, more active lives” (Eli Lilly and Company, 2015). Johnson and Johnson, the global conglomerate which has a medical devices and diagnostics division, is another example. In its main webpage, Johnson and Johnson describes itself as “[c]aring for the world, one person at a time” and as “advanc(ing) the health and well-being of people” (Johnson & Johnson Services, 2015). As such, the social values attached to the ‘healthcare’ part of the work in the healthcare sales industry may facilitate spiritual well-being.

The second feature of work in the healthcare sales industry that is pertinent for this research is the ‘sales’ part. In many ways, the concern for ‘sales’ represents the typical organisation’s concern for meeting bottom line profitability or related outcome-based targets. Healthcare sales companies, just like most profit-making organisations and businesses, face competitive pressures. They are also required to consistently deliver on short- and long-term targets. As such, the ‘sales’ part of the healthcare sales industry enables this research access to the achievement of work targets, an obvious and widely accepted form of work performance. Hence, choosing the healthcare sales industry as the research site is salient because it seems fairly likely that the two central elements of this research, that is, spiritual well-being *and* work performance, may be particularly accessible therein.

There are two reasons why I chose to conduct the research in Malaysia. The first is because of my own (the researcher’s) background. I am a second-generation Malaysian-born Chinese, educated in Malaysia and I have worked in the Malaysian healthcare sales industry for 13 years. This places me in a unique position to conduct the research (I discuss my position as a researcher in more detail in Section 4.5.3). The second is that the work environment in Malaysia may generally reflect, what Groves and Feyerherm (2011) and Meeussen et al. (2014) suggest to be, today’s increasingly culturally diverse work environment. While the general working population in Malaysia may be accustomed to

religious, cultural, and by extension, spiritual pluralism, this mix of cultures, values and beliefs also produces tension and fanaticism. So, while Malaysians may be known for their compromise, tolerance and acceptance of different beliefs, cases of bigotry and religious extremism are equally visible (see Malay Mail Online, 2015; Star Publications (M) Bhd., 2015), which may seep into the work domain. Thus, the Malaysian work context perhaps embodies the future workplace, one which may be characterized by spiritual diversity, and the harmonies and tensions associated with it.

The third issue regarding the research site is this research's choice of participants. Within the healthcare sales industry in Malaysia, healthcare sales representatives are generally viewed as ground-level employees. This level of employees within the organisational hierarchy is the focus of this inquiry. Furthermore, the role of a healthcare sales representative relates principally to 'healthcare' and 'sales' (see Section 3.5.2), which are pivotal elements that may aid this research's investigative focus. Hence, the choice of healthcare sales representatives as research participants seems prudent.

3.4.1 Spirituality in the workplace studies - in healthcare sales and in Malaysia

Following the choice of a research site, it is perhaps pertinent at this point to specifically examine the extant literature for studies on spirituality in the workplace in (1) healthcare sales, and (2) in Malaysia.

There seems to be very little published studies examining spirituality in the workplace in healthcare sales. Instead, the literature search yielded only ones with a *sales* perspective. Nonetheless, these literature are reviewed to gain a better sense of existing related studies specific to this research and its focus. By and large, empirical studies on spirituality in the workplace with a sales perspective take an approach similar to the quantitative studies that were examined in Chapter 2. For instance, these empirical studies attempt to provide statistical evidence of a link between spiritual well-being with proxy constructs of work performance, some of which include job satisfaction, propensity to leave and job commitment (Chawla and Guda, 2010), intrinsic job satisfaction (Marschke et al., 2011) and self-perceptions of sales performance (Malik et al., 2011). The theoretical arguments these studies supply are also relatively similar to the studies examined in Chapter 2. For instance, Chawla and Guda (2010) suggest that the alignment between employees and their

work improves satisfaction at their jobs, reduces turnover and increases their commitment to their jobs, which in turn leads to greater performance.

On the other hand, the search for studies on spirituality in the workplace conducted in Malaysia yielded some, albeit still only a handful of articles. Again, these studies seem identical in form and substance to most spirituality in the workplace and work performance studies that were reviewed in Chapter 2. They seem to be inclined exclusively towards establishing statistical links. For instance, these studies correlate spiritual well-being with a host of other concepts such as work values (Hashim et al. 2009); job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Mardhatillah and Abdul Rahman, 2011); affective commitment (Mat Desa and Koh, 2011); and performance (Osman-Gani et al., 2013).

Despite the variety of work settings these studies were conducted in, such as among hospitality students (Hashim et al. 2009), employees in the accounting sector (Mat Desa and Koh, 2011), telemarketers (Mardhatillah and Abdul Rahman, 2011) and among employees in education, construction, electronic and food manufacturing, hotel and transportation (Osman-Gani et al. 2013), the local and contextual relevance of these different work settings with regard to spiritual well-being seemed unexamined. In fact, all the above-mentioned studies draw their conceptual framework from theoretical arguments suggested by the quantitative studies that were examined in Chapter 2, such as Duchon and Plowman (2005), Milliman et al. (2003) and Rego and Cunha (2008).

Studies that are conducted in the sales setting or in the Malaysian work setting seem to particularly favour quantitative methods, perhaps more so than general studies in the area. These studies also do not address the possible epistemological mismatch between the phenomenon and their method of inquiry and are thus susceptible to many of the criticisms of positivistic research in the area (see for e.g. Case and Gosling, 2010). This review perhaps provides renewed assurance of the identified gaps in knowledge in the area and this research's focus stated in Section 3.1.

3.5 Research site

The purpose of this section is to furnish the reader with the necessary background needed to more fully understand the stories participants tell about their experiences of work,

including the contexts within which the stories are told. This section is divided into two parts. The first part relates to the healthcare sales industry in Malaysia while the second part relates to the healthcare sales representatives and the work they do.

3.5.1 Healthcare and healthcare sales industry in Malaysia

The healthcare industry in Malaysia is a burgeoning industry. According to Performance Management and Delivery Unit¹⁷ (2011), Malaysia's percentage of GDP spending on healthcare in the first decade of this century has been higher than the majority of its Asian peers. This industry seems poised for further growth particularly with the government's strategic goal of promoting Malaysia's healthcare product manufacturing, research and development capabilities (Performance Management & Delivery Unit, 2013_b; PhAMA, 2012). Healthcare is also one of the twelve National Key Economic Areas (NKEAs) identified to help drive the Malaysian economy towards a high-income nation by the year 2020 (Performance Management & Delivery Unit, 2013_b).

The thriving healthcare industry in Malaysia coincides with a thriving healthcare *sales* industry. Reports show that analysts are buoyant about the private hospital services sector, the pharmaceutical market as well as the medical devices industry sectors (see Goh, 2012; Ramlee, 2012a; Oorjitham, 2012 ; Ramlee, 2012b). Frost and Sullivan's (2014) report regarding investment opportunities in the Malaysian healthcare market notes that the forecasted 2012 to 2018 compound annual growth rates for the hospital, pharmaceutical and medical devices segments are robust at 17.3 per cent, 11.4 per cent and 14 per cent respectively. Additionally, the annual growth rate for the pharmaceutical market alone in recent years has been between 8 and 10 per cent, and is estimated at Ringgit Malaysia (RM) 4.5 billion in 2009 (Malaysian Organization of Pharmaceutical Industries, 2015). In 2011, the Malaysian healthcare industry in total is valued at a healthy RM 8.4 billion, representing 4.75 per cent of its gross domestic product (Inside Malaysia, 2012).

However, the products for the healthcare market are currently largely supplied by imports. A 2012 Pharmaceutical Association of Malaysia (PhAMA) report notes that as much as 70 per cent of the demand for pharmaceutical drugs in Malaysia is from imports (PhAMA, 2012). In 2013, the Association of Malaysian Medical Industries (AMMI) was cited as

¹⁷ The Performance Management and Delivery Unit of Malaysia is an entity set up to oversee economic and government-based transformation programs in the country (Pemandu, 2013).

reporting that more than 85 per cent of the medical devices consumed domestically were imported (Star Publications (M) Bhd., 2013). What this means is that multinational healthcare sales companies play a prominent role in the provision of healthcare products and services in Malaysia compared to local manufacturers or distributors. Thus, this research focuses on selecting research participants from multinational healthcare sales companies in Malaysia.

In general, the multinational healthcare sales companies based in Malaysia operate across two main *industry sectors*, i.e. the pharmaceutical and the medical devices sectors. Examples of companies in the pharmaceutical sector include Eli Lilly (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd¹⁸, GlaxoSmithKline (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd, Pfizer (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd and Aventis Sdn Bhd. Together, these selected multinational pharmaceutical sales companies promote pharmaceutical drugs in the central nervous systems, cardiovascular, oncology, vaccines-preventable and respiratory diseases therapeutic areas (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: Examples of multinational healthcare sales companies in Malaysia by industry sector

Healthcare industry sector	Examples of multinational healthcare sales companies	Examples of product therapeutic areas
Pharmaceutical	Eli Lilly (M) Sdn Bhd GlaxoSmithKline Pharmaceutical (M) Sdn Bhd Pfizer (M) Sdn Bhd Sanofi Aventis (M) Sdn Bhd	Central nervous systems, Cardiovascular, Oncology, Vaccines, Diabetes, Osteoporosis, Men's health, Infectious Disease, Ophthalmology, Respiratory Disease
Medical products	3M (Malaysia) B Braun (Malaysia) Johnson and Johnson Medical (Malaysia) Molnlycke Health Care Sdn Bhd	Orthopaedic implants, Surgical instruments, Coated medical tapes, Haemodialysis concentrates, Endosurgical equipment, Wound Care Products, Surgical Drapes, Stethoscope, Dental Products

Source: Malaysian Organization of Pharmaceutical Industries (MOPI), Pharmaceutical Association of Malaysia (PhAMA), Malaysian Medical Device Association (MMDA), Association of Malaysia Medical Industries (AMMI).

Examples of companies in the medical devices industry sector include companies such as 3M (Malaysia), B. Braun (Malaysia), Johnson and Johnson Medical (Malaysia), Molnlycke Health Care Sdn Bhd. The medical devices these companies promote include orthopaedic

¹⁸ 'Sdn Bhd' stands for '*Sendirian Berhad*' in the Malay language, meaning *Private Limited*.

implants, surgical instruments and wound care products (see Table 3.1). In total, the multinational healthcare sales companies in Malaysia across the pharmaceutical and medical devices sectors cater to a comprehensive range of healthcare products.

The multinational healthcare sales companies based in Malaysia are mostly local subsidiaries of research-based healthcare sales companies with headquarters in The United States, The United Kingdom or in Europe. Thus, the pharmaceutical products or medical devices they carry comply with quality requirements of regulatory bodies such as the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the European Commission's *Conformité Européenne* mark. In the main, the products marketed by multinational healthcare sales companies in Malaysia are prescription-based or are used by medical professionals as opposed to being over-the-counter medication¹⁹ or medical devices for direct patient use. Because of the nature of their products, multinational healthcare sales companies' target clientele are typically limited to medical professionals such as doctors, nurses, pharmacists, laboratory technologists and/or administrators of healthcare institutions. It is thus rare for multinational healthcare sales companies to promote their products directly to patients.

The healthcare sales market in Malaysia can be divided into three *market sectors*, namely the hospital, the general practitioner (GP) and the retail pharmacy sectors. These market sectors represent both private and public healthcare services in Malaysia (Yu et al., 2008; N. Othman et al., 2010; Hassali et al., 2009). Private healthcare services are represented by all three market sectors, are demand-driven and are generally accessed by the financially-able or the segment of the population with health insurance coverage. Business with the private sector can be characterized as lucrative since they cater to a wealthier population.

On the other hand, public healthcare services cater to the poorer segment of Malaysians (Yu et al., 2008). They are also exclusively government-funded (Hassali et al., 2009). Public healthcare services are primarily represented by the hospital sector. Healthcare sales companies face two main issues when promoting their products to public healthcare services. The first issue is that the process of promoting their products can be tedious and complicated because the selling process involves a host of institutional stakeholders rather than healthcare providers on an individual basis. For instance, a typical product purchase process involves the group of prescribing doctors, the heads of department, the chief

¹⁹ Medication supplied without the need of medical prescription from a healthcare professional.

pharmacist, hospital director(s) or accountant(s) wherein each stakeholder has the clout to support or reject the purchase.

The second issue healthcare sales companies typically face in its business with the public healthcare service organisations is cost. Malaysian public healthcare service institutions have limited funds for purchasing high-end healthcare products typically marketed by multinational healthcare sales companies. Public healthcare services constantly have to balance the need for a product with financial constraints. Nonetheless, the public healthcare services market is still very lucrative. Government spending on public healthcare services in Malaysia represented 44 per cent of the country's total healthcare spending in 2007 (Performance Management and Delivery Unit, 2011), a sizable market for healthcare sales companies.

Regulatory and representative bodies in the healthcare and healthcare sales industry in Malaysia include the Ministry of Health (MOH) Malaysia, the National Pharmaceutical Control Bureau (NPCB) and the Drug Control Authority (DCA), which regulate the pharmaceutical sector, while the Medical Device Control Division (MDCD) regulates the medical devices sector. The Pharmaceutical Association of Malaysia (PhAMA), Malaysian Medical Devices Association (MMDA) and AMMI function to consolidate political voice, cooperation and influence in the Malaysian healthcare sales industry and among local and international regulatory bodies. Some of these representative bodies can exert influence on the conduct of healthcare sales companies and their activities. For example, members of PhAMA are bounded to the PhAMA Code of Pharmaceutical Marketing Practices by their own volition. This code sets out the "standards for the ethical promotion of pharmaceutical products" (PhAMA, 2010, p. 4) for all healthcare sales companies operating in Malaysia.

While there may be some explicit interest in spiritual matters in healthcare in Malaysia (see for e.g. Nagu [2013] and Raja Lexshimi et al. [2014]), the literature on the healthcare sales industry in Malaysia generally does not show much interest in the topic. This is not to say, however, that notions of spirituality in the workplace are not considered therein. The vision and mission statements of some multinational healthcare sales companies clearly pertain to the notions of meaning, connection and values. This is also not to take for granted that the healthcare sales industry and its workforce engage substantially with ideas surrounding spiritual well-being either. Perhaps it may be timely to increase spirituality in the workplace-related vocabulary into published material on this industry.

3.5.2 Healthcare sales representatives

According to Masood et al. (2009), multinational healthcare sales organisations in Malaysia promote their products and services via a hosts of ways, such as medical conferences, lectures, roundtable discussions, advertisement or via online resources. Nonetheless, healthcare sales representatives represent the main conduit between healthcare sales organisations and their customers (Andaleeb and Tallman, 1996; Gaedeke et al., 1999). In this section, aspects of the healthcare sales representatives' job that pertain to the focus of this research are discussed. They relate to three elements in the conceptual framework, namely work targets, work features and work contexts.

3.5.2.1 Work (sales) targets and work features

The healthcare sales representative's primary role is to achieve his or her sales targets. They secure sales by selling their company's products and/or services (the phrase 'products and/or services' will henceforth be referred to as 'products'). And the main way healthcare sales representatives sell their company's products is via, what the industry refers to as, 'sales calls' (Gagnon and Lexchin, 2008). The core task during sales calls is to represent and promote the use of their companies' products.

In the healthcare sales industry in Malaysia, the sales call is not a one-off promotional activity. The time between product introduction to purchase and utilization can range from weeks to years. In general, selling a relatively simple and well-established product such as a diabetic drug or a skin suture may require only a few sales calls. On the other hand, selling a newly-approved drug for post-transplant patients or advanced laparoscopic equipment may require substantially more than a few sales calls. Furthermore, the healthcare sales industry in Malaysia is generally a repeat-order industry. Hence, healthcare sales representatives conduct sales calls repeatedly, in most cases to the same set of clients.

Sales calls are planned based on the different needs of different market sectors (i.e. GP, retail pharmacy and hospital, or private and government-funded healthcare centres) and different industry sectors (i.e. the pharmaceutical and medical devices sales sectors). Experienced healthcare sales representative are generally sensitive to the needs of the

sector they are servicing. In the medical devices sales sector, sales representatives are expected to be more hands-on and are occasionally required to assist their customers with their devices. This means that their sales calls may take place in a variety of settings, for instance in the hospital wards, in the interventional coronary unit or in the operation theatre.

Being hands-on is a job feature that has two important implications for medical devices sales representatives. The first implication is that, over time, medical devices sales representatives become proficient in the practical use of their devices as well as become knowledgeable in the device-related medical interventions. The experience these medical devices sales representatives gain over time makes them a valuable asset to the attending medical team. The second implication is that sales representatives get instant feedback regarding the application of their medical devices. This probably helps foster continuous learning for the medical devices sales representative and rapport with their clients. Indeterminate working hours are common in this case because sales representatives may be called in after normal working hours to assist clients with the use of their devices.

Compared to medical devices sales, the pharmaceutical sales representative's role is generally less hands-on with regard to the client's practice. For them, the sales call is essentially a verbal task. They are expected to sell their products by communicating their products' features, advantages and benefits to their clients with the help of promotional tools such as detailing aids (summarized version of published studies) and reprints of published studies. As such, the sales calls for pharmaceutical sales representatives typically take place in the clinic, office or pharmacy. In contrast to their medical devices sales counterparts, pharmaceutical sales representatives rarely get involve with their customers' medical practice. For instance, it is unlikely for pharmaceutical sales representatives to advise doctors on drug prescription choices.

In this way, pharmaceutical sales representatives remain at the periphery while medical devices sales representatives can be a central part of their clients' practice. What seems likely is that the pharmaceutical sales representative's engagement with the 'health' part of the job may lack the depth of engagement medical sales representatives experience in theirs. Perhaps the 'sales' part of the job assumes greater attention then. Within simple reasoning, this may mean that the medical sales representative's job accommodates spiritual inclinations to a greater extent than the pharmaceutical sales representative's job.

However and at this point, these are merely generalisations of the possible implications the features of the job may have on the healthcare sales representative's experience of work with regard to spiritual well-being.

A discussion about features of the healthcare sales representative's job is incomplete without discussing sales targets, what the industry considers to be of critical significance. Sales targets for healthcare sales representatives in Malaysia are mostly individually-based and are typically set every fiscal year or every successive quarter during the year. They are based on several factors such as overall company targets, product growth potential, market saturation, competitive forces, sales representative experience and product life cycles. Sales targets are generally inflexible once they have been set, even in the event when unforeseeable circumstances drastically jeopardises sales. Meeting the sales target is also a minimum criterion for keeping one's job – failing to meet one's sales targets over time can be considered as grounds for dismissal.

In section 3.1, it was argued that this research should focus on *actual* and *good* work performance. Thus, it might be appropriate to at this point to describe what constitutes *actual* and *good* work performance for healthcare sales representatives in Malaysia. The work performance of healthcare sales representatives' is usually assessed based on various aspects of their work. However, in my conversation with industry peers (Bose, 2012; Khaw, 2012), sales target achievements alone carry equal or more weightage on the healthcare sales representative's overall assessment of work performance than other performance measures combined in most cases. The most telling evidence for this emphasis is the system of incentivizing sales representatives: financial incentives are typically paid out based primarily on the sales representatives' sales target achievements. Thus, defining 'work performance' in terms of sales target achievements seems important if *actual* work performance is sought.

The focus of this research is also on *good* as opposed to *mediocre* work performance. In practice, distinguishing good from mediocre work performance entails being alert to genuine sales achievements. Inconsistent achievement of sales targets, for instance, may reflect chance occurrences, such as when sales targets are set below the full sales potential of a sales territory, or sales manipulations, such as when sales representatives generate sales without generating a genuine growth in product usage. It is not uncommon to hear of healthcare sales representatives in Malaysia manipulating sales by placing future sales into

the current sales cycle. However, these tactics are unlikely to sustain the sales representatives' sales targets achievements over the longer term. On the other hand, consistent sales target achievements is likely to be a better indicator of genuine sales achievements. Therefore, selecting healthcare sales representatives that consistently achieve their sales targets helps this research identify good and genuine work performance (the criteria for good work performance are described in detail in Section 4.5.1).

3.5.2.2 Work contexts

Some work contexts surrounding the healthcare sales representative's job relevant to this investigation are highlighted in this section. Firstly, healthcare sales representatives, according to Morelli and Braganza (2012), are knowledge workers. For instance, healthcare sales representatives need to keep abreast with product, therapeutic and technical advances in order to promote their products effectively. They are also expected to understand their market, from the general needs of specific market sectors to the specific needs of their individual clients. They are, as Davenport (2010) describes knowledge workers, the segment of employees "whose primary tasks involves the manipulation of knowledge and information" (p.17)

Secondly, healthcare sales representatives in Malaysia are generally given a lot of autonomy in the way they pursue their sales, perhaps because of work being primarily knowledge-based. For instance, they are given control and flexibility over the way they plan, execute, evaluate and alter their sales calls. In fact, healthcare sales representatives are expected to explore and initiate alternative ways to meet their customers' needs and to achieve their sales targets on their own because market conditions are dynamic and frequently specific to their sales territory. Except for the occasional field visit with their managers or company-wide marketing events, healthcare sales representatives generally work autonomously. If, as Pink (2010) suggests, autonomous work tends to foster greater intrinsic motivation and positive attitudes towards work, it may also facilitate an experience of greater meaning and purpose at work.

Thirdly, healthcare sales representatives in Malaysia are arguably well-remunerated, especially with the potential financial incentives that accompany the job. The following salary reports shed light. According to the Department of Statistics of Malaysia (2015), the

2014 median and mean monthly salaries of working Malaysians are RM 1,575 and RM 2,231 respectively. In a separate online report, the average monthly salary of a pharmaceutical sales representative in Malaysia, including incentives, ranges between RM 2,500 to RM 7,900 (Payscale Inc., 2014). Assuming that a higher income generally helps satisfy lower order needs, healthcare sales representatives in Malaysia may be in a position to instead seek satisfying their higher level of needs, including their spiritual inclinations.

However, the healthcare sales representative's job in Malaysia can also appear to be antagonistic to spiritual well-being. The business can be unforgiving, intensely brutal and as such *un*-altruistic. In many ways, some degree of an opportunistic attitude may be required for attaining one's sales or winning it from the competition. And it may not always be fully clear the extent of the benefit of one's products for one's clients and their patients, for example when price promotions are offered in the interest of enticing larger purchase orders. Usually, the pervasive ambience of work during the end of every sales quarter or every fiscal year is *all about the numbers* and rarely about improving healthcare outcomes.

The closing sales figures are important for the healthcare sales representative perhaps because they are closely linked to their financial incentives, which is the fourth and final work context discussed here. It is an important context of work to consider in this research because it can wield strong influences on employees and the way they approach their work. First, the reader is introduced to the kind of financial incentives used in the healthcare sales industry in Malaysia. After that, the influence of financial incentives on employees and their work is examined under the larger category of extrinsic rewards followed by some observations of the possible implications financial incentives may have on this research's participants.

Although healthcare sales companies incentivize their sales representatives in many ways²⁰, this discussion is focused specifically on financial incentives because its use is ubiquitous among multinational healthcare sales companies in Malaysia. Kow and Yew (2012) make the same observations albeit only for the pharmaceutical industry. By financial incentives, I am referring to money that is paid out once healthcare sales representatives meet their sales targets. The amount of financial incentives paid out can increase exponentially corresponding to the quantum of sales in excess of the healthcare

²⁰ Incentives can take many forms including promotions, commissions and bonuses – all of which have strong financial implications.

sales representatives' sales targets. What this simply means is that financial incentives form an important additional and lucrative part of the healthcare sales representative's income. These financial incentives are paid out either monthly, quarterly, half-yearly, yearly, or paid out in a combination of these various time periods. The consistency and frequency of financial incentive pay-outs are perhaps meant to encourage healthcare sales representatives to achieve their sales targets consistently throughout the fiscal year.

Financial incentives, according to Kohn (1993), are one form of extrinsic reward because the source of motivation it exerts is external to the individual. And because financial incentives are paid out only after sales representatives meet their sales targets, this type of incentivizing is contingent in nature. Pink (2010) describes them succinctly as "if-then rewards ... if you do this, then you'll get that" (p.38). Extrinsic rewards were initially conceived to be an effective strategy to motivate behaviour. According to Deci et al. (1999), "(w)hen administered closely subsequent to a behavior, rewards were reliably found to increase the likelihood that the behavior would be emitted again, an effect that persisted as long as the reward contingency was operative" (p.627). This theory seems to have been widely adopted by organisations to motivate employees to higher performance levels.

But, extrinsic rewards do not seem to be suited for all circumstances. One of the main issues with extrinsic rewards is its negative impact on intrinsic motivation. Deci et al. (1999) describes intrinsic motivation as an inner drive that needs no external encouraging among human subjects. For example, some studies show that extrinsic rewards should not be used in contexts where people already find the work to be interesting (Deci et al. 1999), or to be creative and noble (Pink, 2010). Deci et al. (1999) and Pink (2010) concur that undermining intrinsic motivation appears to severely undermine work performance. Thus, extrinsic rewards should not be used when the tasks themselves are intrinsically motivating.

A caveat for these findings relates to the kinds of work employees do. For instance, Pfeffer and Sutton (2006) suggest that extrinsic rewards are only able to motivate people to higher performance when the work is fairly simple, straightforward or linear. This seems evident even among the strongest of proponents for the use of extrinsic rewards. For example, a scrutiny of Jenkins Jr. et al.'s (1998) meta-analytic review show a positive correlation of financial incentives only with performance quantity, not performance quality. Using

extrinsic rewards as a motivational tool, Pfeffer and Sutton (2006) explain, results in an increase in effort but has no effect on a person's ability, hence explaining its effects on performance quantity and not quality.

Furthermore, several researchers (see Pink, 2010; Pfeffer and Sutton, 2006; Stajkovic and Luthans, 2001) argue that the use of extrinsic rewards results in a deficit in intrinsic motivation and in performance when used alongside tasks that were non-linear, complex and multi-dimensional. This finding is further substantiated by Kuvaas' (2006) study among knowledge workers, who arguably engage in work that are better characterized as complex and multi-dimensional rather than simple and linear. Kuvaas' (2006) study finds that pay and bonus levels (forms of extrinsic reward) are not related to work performance and affective commitment. His conclusion is that organizations need to consider "deemphasiz[ing] variable pay as a control mechanism" (Kuvaas, 2006, p.380).

A second caveat relates to the way employees perceive what extrinsic rewards to be. In a meta-analysis of the empirical evidence on the effects of extrinsic rewards on intrinsic motivation, Deci et al. (1999) report that extrinsic rewards undermined intrinsic motivation when people interpreted them as a form of control. Alternatively, extrinsic rewards seem to enhance intrinsic motivation when people interpreted them as an indicator of competence. However, and if as Kohn (1993) asserts, that the majority of organisations use extrinsic rewards as a form of control, the effect of extrinsic rewards would tend to curb intrinsic motivation and decrease work performance. McGregor (1985) suggests that such attempts to control behaviour "are in direct violation of human nature" (p.9). This, in turn, may also stifle spiritual inclinations and well-being at work.

There seems to be at least three other implications of extrinsic rewards on the experiences of healthcare sales representatives in Malaysia that are relevant to this research. Firstly, extrinsic rewards have been suggested to cause people to focus on short term achievement to the exclusion of longer term efforts (Ordóñez et al., 2009; Pfeffer and Sutton, 2006; Pink, 2010) because they are usually tied to the achievement of specific short-term goals. From a goal setting perspective, Ordóñez et al. (2009) argue, "the narrow focus of specific goals can inspire performance but prevent learning" (p.11). Additionally, theoretical arguments suggest that such a narrow work focus can cause the workforce to improve only along incentivized dimensions (Pfeffer and Sutton, 2006) and to ignore important longer

term issues (Pink, 2010; Ordóñez et al., 2009), leading to poorer work outcomes eventually.

Secondly, there seem to be consensus that a disproportionate focus on extrinsic rewards is likely to also encourage unethical behaviour (Ordóñez et al.; Kohn, 1993; Pink, 2010; Pfeffer and Sutton, 2006). Ordóñez et al. (2009) cites an example where employees from the organisation Miniscribe shipped bricks in replacement of disk drives in order to meet shipping targets! As such, employees may find ways to circumvent the extrinsic reward system by meeting the criteria for incentives without meeting their work goals. In this way, incentives, Kohn (1993) argues, motivate people primarily to get incentives.

Thirdly, people are likely to stop striving the moment extrinsic rewards are achieved, relegating organisations to mediocrity rather than encouraging excellence. In essence, these arguments seem to suggest that the use of financial incentives in multinational healthcare sales companies in Malaysia accentuates the ‘sales’ rather than the ‘health’ part of the job.

Perhaps the most intriguing study in the area of financial incentives is by Rothe (1970). His study calls into question the benefits of extrinsic rewards on work performance even for simple and straightforward tasks. Rothe (1970) conducted his study on the productivity of welders in a manufacturing establishment in Midwestern United States. Following the removal of an incentive system, the welders in his study ended up with less take home pay. After an initial drop in productivity, Rothe (1970) reported that productivity returned to its pre-incentive removal period by the end of the 48 week study period. Though there was no evidence to support it, Rothe (1970) supposed that “the incentive to work had changed from a financial one to social ones” (p.550), wherein the foremen’s increased engagement with the welders seemed to have effectively replaced the motivation provided initially by the incentive system.

Despite the seemingly convincing evidence against extrinsic rewards, they are still often used as an integral management and organisational tool. If the said influences of extrinsic rewards and financial incentives on employees and their motivations and work performance hold water, it would be insightful to examine them alongside employees who may also be spiritually-inclined. Would financial incentives wholly distract healthcare sales representatives from their spiritual inclinations at work? Do financial incentives potentially shift the healthcare sales representatives’ focus away from the ‘healthcare’ part

of the job to the 'sales' part of the job? Examining these possible tensions bears important significance to this research because the principal behind the use of incentives, especially its conditional nature, exists in the healthcare sales industry in Malaysia as well as in many forms in organisational life.

3.6 Concluding remarks

Based on four identifiable gaps in the literature, this research's focus has been constructed. The research's focus also seems to be sufficient to enter the empirical phase of the research. The conceptual framework, research purposes and research questions function as scaffolds to guide the inquiry and field work. In the latter half of this chapter, the research site was described and possible contexts and features of work that may be relevant for this research were identified and examined. These will provide initial background to help readers understand the experiences of healthcare sales representatives in Malaysia examined in Chapters 5 and 6.

Chapter 4 Methodology

This chapter explains the empirical approach taken in the research. It is shaped by the conceptual framework, research questions, research purposes as well as the research site, aspects of this research which were discussed in Chapter 3. This chapter is organised into five parts. The first part examines the potential strengths and shortcomings of qualitative research, and why qualitative research befits this research's aims. The second part discusses four interrelated elements of the research, i.e. epistemology (and ontology), theoretical perspective, methodology and method. This discussion grounds the data collection in my philosophical assumptions about the nature of knowledge. The third part addresses issues regarding validity and ethics as they relate to the research generally and the methodology and method specifically. The fourth part covers issues related to fieldwork, which is the practical application of sections one to three. The fifth and final part explains how the process of data analysis was rationalised.

4.1 Qualitative research

It is frequently argued that qualitative research provides researchers with considerable depth and contextual appreciation of the social phenomena under investigation (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Myers, 2009). Thus, qualitative researchers typically keep the research process flexible so as to be responsive to emergent issues (Bryman and Bell, 2011) and generally adopt a strong tendency for the inductive rather than the deductive approach (Patton, 2002). Relatedly, qualitative research is also said to be particularly suited for exploratory research purposes (Creswell, 1998) as well as for understanding multiple views, that is, the "ways in which people in particular settings come to understand, account for, take action, and otherwise manage their day-to-day situations" (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.7). Based on these claims, qualitative research seems particularly suited for this research.

However, Hammersley (2008) argues that qualitative research has shortcomings with respect to what it says it does. For instance, he points out that some qualitative researchers treat qualitative data, such as interview responses, as stable and accurate reflections of people's views and behaviour across different contexts after claiming that qualitative research recognises the contingent and emergent processes of social phenomena

(Hammersley, 2008). This potential shortcoming is pertinent to this research since the method of data collection is the interview. Nonetheless, and as will be explained in sections 4.2.3, 4.2.4 and 4.6.3 on methodology, method and data analysis respectively, this research makes deliberate attempts to guard against treating the data as *merely* reflecting reality or truth of the participants' experiences.

Hammersley (2008) also points out that qualitative researchers claim to rely on theoretical rather than on empirical generalisations²¹ although it is still unclear whether theoretical generalisations are possible and verifiable. The small sample size usually adopted by qualitative researchers (Bryman and Bell, 2011) does not seem to help researchers with their claims for theoretical generalisations. However, it seems reasonable to suggest that findings from qualitative research can be generalised to the degree to which the perspectives, contexts and processes of the generalised others are consistent with the participants'. Nevertheless, the heterogeneity of social phenomena, as qualitative researchers generally believe, may impede the generalisability of qualitative research findings directly to other settings. This is possibly why claims of theoretical generalisations are difficult to justify and to verify.

Even with these possible shortcomings, qualitative research, as opposed to quantitative research, is more suited for this research. According to Bryman and Bell (2011), quantitative research tends to fragment, limit and standardise social phenomena so that measurements and relationships by way of mathematical methods are possible. These strategies are unlikely to assist this research's aim to explore the employees' spiritual inclinations and their possible influences on work performance in greater depth. As such, it might be worthwhile to examine further the usefulness of qualitative research.

According to Maxwell (1996), there are five purposes for which qualitative research is well suited for. Maxwell's (1996) claims of the strengths of qualitative research seem to be similarly echoed by other texts on qualitative research (see for e.g. Miles and Huberman, 1994; Bryman and Bell, 2011). In the following paragraphs, each of these five purposes, listed in Table 4.1, and the extent to which they facilitate this research's aims will be discussed.

²¹ Empirical generalization can be explained as generalizing findings to other members of the population while theoretical generalization relates to the generalization of the nature of a process (Gobo, 2004).

Table 4.1: Five purposes of qualitative research

No	Purpose for which qualitative research is especially suited for
1	Understanding the <i>meaning</i> , for participants in the study, of the events, situation, and actions they are involved with and of the accounts that they give of their lives and experiences.
2	Understanding the particular <i>context</i> within which the participants act, and the influence that this context has on their actions.
3	Identifying <i>unanticipated</i> phenomena and influences, and generating new grounded theories about the latter.
4	Understanding the <i>process</i> by which events and actions take place.
5	Developing <i>causal explanations</i> .

(Source: Maxwell, 1996, pp. 17-20.)

The first of the five purposes listed in Table 4.1 refers to *understanding meaning*. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), understanding the meaning people attach to their lives can be attained with qualitative data. In contrast to quantitative data which some researchers argue privileges the researcher's worldviews over the participant's, qualitative data privileges the participant's worldviews instead (Marshall and Rossman, 1999). The aim of this research is to understand the participants' experience of work. In essence, this research is about "the meaning that participants attribute to actions – their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values, and assumptive world" (Marshall and Rossman, 1999, p.57). As such and to a large extent, *understanding meaning* seems to assist this research in achieving its intended objectives.

The second of the five purposes refers to *understanding context*. Qualitative researchers generally view contexts to be central to understanding social phenomena (Bryman and Bell, 2011). In this sense, understanding the meaning people attribute to their work also means understanding the contexts within which meanings are derived. Like *understanding meaning*, *understanding context* seem central to this research's investigative focus. The centrality of *understanding contexts* in this research is somewhat evident since 'work contexts' represents one of the main elements in the conceptual framework (see Figure 3.1).

The third purpose qualitative research is particularly suited for, in Maxwell's (1996) view, is in *identifying unanticipated phenomena*. The discovery of unanticipated phenomena or influences represents another important aim in this research since it is exploratory. As Miles and Huberman (1994) observe, a feature of good qualitative data is its ability to provide rich, holistic descriptions and revealing the complexity therein.

The fourth of the five purposes is *understanding process*. Because qualitative researchers generally view social phenomena to be processual in nature (Hammersley, 2008), *understanding process* thus means understanding social phenomena in depth. For this research, *understanding process* may mean understanding the influences and counter-influences of the participant's experience of work, particularly with regard to spiritual inclinations and work targets. *Understanding process* may also be a way for this research to understand how, whether and to what extent spiritual well-being and work performance are related. Therefore, *understanding process* may also support this research's aims.

The fifth purpose is *developing causal explanations*. The assertion that qualitative research can develop causal explanations raises controversy. In fact, Hammersley (2008) observes that qualitative researchers sometimes avoid making causal claims in their analysis. On the other hand, Maxwell (1996) argues that both quantitative and qualitative research make causal analysis with the former group focusing on variance, i.e. the extent to which one thing causes another, and the latter group focusing on process, i.e. how one thing leads to another. This interest in this research is in developing causal explanations with a focus on process. Following Maxwell's (1996) argument, *developing causal explanations* seems to further this research's aim to understand the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance.

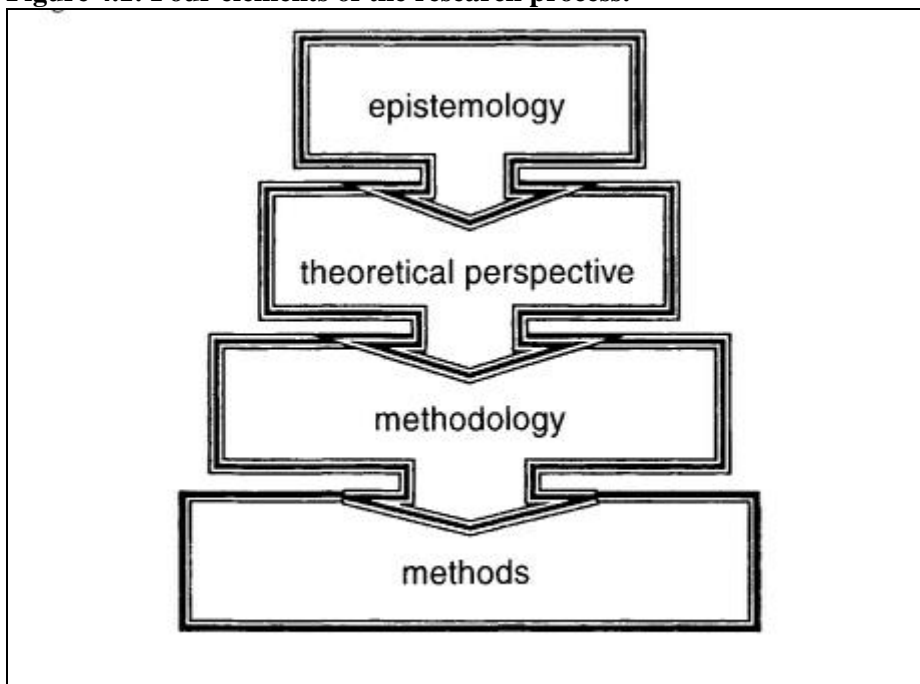
The above examination shows that qualitative research is likely to be suited for this research. Hence, qualitative research is selected.

4.2 Linking epistemology to methods

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), researchers ought to consider their assumptions of the nature of the phenomena before making decisions on methods of data collection. Crotty (1998) and Burrell and Morgan (1979) both provide systematic ways for researchers

to examine their assumptions as they undertake research work. However, Crotty's (1998) framework of the research process is particularly useful because it helps the researcher connect his or her basic assumptions with the research method. Specifically, Crotty (1998) links epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods together and in the corresponding sequence as his proposed framework of the research process (see Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1: Four elements of the research process.



(Source: Crotty, 1998, p.5)

Crotty (1998) describes epistemology as the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspectives. In turn, the theoretical perspective represents the philosophical stance that informs the researcher's choice of methodology. The methodology is the underlying strategy that guides the researcher's choice of methods. And finally, methods are techniques and tools researchers employ in the field. Crotty's (1998) framework emphasizes how each preceding element informs the successive element. Therefore, the researcher's choice of methods is ultimately grounded in his or her epistemology. These four elements represent the frame within which this empirical research is developed. Each of the four elements is discussed in turn in the following sections.

4.2.1 Epistemology – Constructionism

I had initially examined my ontological and epistemological assumptions of the nature of social science one after the other by seeing whether they lie within the subjectivist or objectivist approaches²². What I realized was that it is difficult to discuss ontological and epistemological assumptions separately. While my assumptions leaned towards the subjectivist approach, I realized that the objectivist approach could not be rejected entirely. Crotty (1998) and Guba (1990) offer a way to resolve this dilemma. They observe that ontological and epistemological issues are not conceptually distinct from each other especially when considered from a constructionist, as opposed to a subjectivist or objectivist, paradigm. As such, I will examine my epistemological assumptions, i.e. how I know what I know, and my ontological assumptions, i.e. what is reality, in tandem in the following paragraphs.

According to Burrell and Morgan (1979), subjectivists view ‘reality’ as residing solely within the individual’s consciousness. Objectivists, on the other hand, views ‘reality’ as residing solely outside of the individual’s consciousness. However, Crotty (1998) observes that constructionists view ‘reality’ as of a constructed nature, rather than being of a purely subjective or objective nature. To constructionists, “actual meaning emerges only when consciousness engages with [objects of the world]” (Crotty, 1998, p.43). Thus, meaning-making is the fusing of the subjective mind with the objective world where neither the subject nor the object alone constitutes meaning.

“Because of this essential relationship that human experience bears to its object, no object can be adequately described in isolation from the conscious being experiencing it, nor can any experience be adequately described in isolation from its object.” (Crotty, 1998, p.45)

What this also means, from a constructionist perspective, is that the individual’s consciousness is mindful of and constructs meaning within the confines of the object of attention; the construction of meaning is not a free-for-all or unrestricted process (Crotty, 1998).

²² I used Burrell and Morgan’s (1979) framework which examines assumptions of ontology, epistemology, human nature and methodology within the subjectivist and objectivist approaches.

Guba (1990) notes what he saw as the three basic tenets of constructionism²³. Firstly, ““(r)eaity” exists only in the context of a mental framework (construct) for thinking about it” (Guba, 1990, p.25). Secondly, there are not one but many constructions of reality, corresponding to each individual’s perspective or worldview. Crotty (1998) argues that the same reality can yield different interpretations, which suggests that the interpretations human beings make of their experiences are neither true nor valid. As such, inquiry is not about seeking an ultimate single truth (Guba, 1990). Thirdly, perspectives are driven by values inherent in the individuals concerned. Inquiry, Guba (1990) argues, “cannot be value free” (p.25). The three tenets mentioned above seem to support the constructionists’ position where inquiry fuses both the knower and the known (Guba, 1990). Methodologically, the constructionists’ goal is to uncover and investigate the many constructions and look at how they relate to each other (Guba, 1990).

The basic tenets of constructionism, as Guba (1990) explains them, seem to parallel the notions of spirituality in the workplace, as discussed in Chapter 2. Firstly, the notions of spirituality in the workplace can be seen as a ‘mental framework’ for thinking about and making sense of our experiences. Secondly, spiritual well-being is unlikely to have a singular meaning, corresponding perhaps to the constructionists’ belief of the many constructions of reality. Thirdly, both constructionism and spiritual well-being pertains to the individual’s worldviews, including his or her values. These parallels seem to suggest that the constructionist epistemology is compatible with the way the research on the topic is conceived. As such, my assumption of what reality is and how I come to understand reality, with regard to this research on spiritual inclinations and spiritual well-being, is grounded in constructionism.

4.2.2 Theoretical perspective

The second element in Crotty’s (1998) framework of the research process is theoretical perspective (see Figure 4.2). Specifically, Crotty (1998) defines theoretical perspective as: (1) the philosophical stances that flow from the researcher’s epistemological assumptions and (2) the perspectives that undergird the research’s methodology. Following Crotty’s (1998) framework, the research’s theoretical perspectives have to resonate with the researcher’s epistemological assumptions as well as the researcher’s choice of

²³ In his texts, Guba (1990) uses the term ‘constructivism’ instead. Nonetheless, Guba’s meaning of the term ‘constructivism’ parallels Crotty’s (1998) meaning of the term ‘constructionism’.

methodology. So, before discussing the research's theoretical perspectives, it is perhaps useful to provide an introduction to the methodology, that is, narrative inquiry. In this section, a general introduction to narrative inquiry is provided before what the term narrative or story may mean is discussed. After that, the theoretical perspectives underpinning narrative inquiry as the methodology are stated.

According to Webster and Mertova (2007), narrative inquiry has mostly been developed in tandem with postmodernist cues. Specifically, the authors refer to narrative inquiry's focus on individuals and their experiences in constructing knowledge rather than on an ultimate objective truth. Relatedly, Bruner's (1991) and Riessman's (1993) writings strongly imply that the theoretical perspective of narrative inquiry resides within the philosophical assumptions of constructionism. For instance, Bruner (1991) discusses narrative features in his article by examining how narrative "operates as an instrument of mind in the construction of reality" (p.6). The close association of the theoretical perspective of narrative inquiry and constructionism (my epistemological stance) partly reaffirms the research's choice of narrative inquiry as its methodology.

In the past three decades, narrative research has been undertaken in studies in the fields of economics, biology, environmental science (Webster and Mertova, 2007), psychology, sociology, law, medicine, education (Lieblich et al., 1998) and history (Cronon, 1992). In business and management research, Bryman and Bell (2011) cited Czarniawska (1998) and Boje (2001) as examples of research using narrative as a method of inquiry. It also has practical applications (see for instance, Hansen and Kahnweiler, 1993 and Lieber, 1997). For instance, Lieber (1997) cites cases where narrative inquiry, rather than the traditional methods of surveys or focus groups, was more successful in helping organisations comprehend and integrate their customer needs. Narrative inquiry, it seems, is useful for both research and practice.

The utility of narrative inquiry in research and in practice seems obvious to narrative researchers because they believe that the human world is inundated with stories. For instance, Fludernik (2009) argues that we are always either narrating or being narrated to, through books, television, radio, another person(s) and through other modes of communication. Additionally, narrative researchers conceive stories to be so central to people's lives that people are naturally assumed to be storytellers (Lieblich et al. 1998; Connelly and Clandinin, 2000). Fludernik (2009) even assigns the term "professional

narrators” (p.1) to people who frequently engage in storytelling, such as teachers, press officers or comedians.

The discussion at this point shifts to how narrative researchers define the terms narrative and story. This research’s sole interest is in first-person accounts of narratives or stories. Hence, this discussion is drawn from texts that consider first-person accounts of narratives or stories. Texts that consider instead group or organisational narratives, such as Boje (1991) and Czarniawska (2006), are not included in this review although their studies are located within organisational research. Specifically, the subsequent discussion is drawn from texts within social studies (Riessman, 1993 and 2008; Frank (2000), psychology (Bruner 1991; Lieblich et al., 1998), education (Webster and Mertova; Connelly and Clandinin), and literary (Fludernik, 2009) fields.

Other than the broad reference of narrative and story to some kind of discourse, these terms have been used to refer to a variety of things. For instance, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) refer to story as the phenomenon and narrative as the method of inquiry. On the other hand, Webster and Mertova (2007) and Riessman (2008) did not see the need to distinguish between narrative and story; rather, both represent human experience. My view resonates more with Frank’s (2000) account of the distinction between narrative and story. He suggests that people tell stories, not narratives. Instead, the term narrative refers to “a structure underpinning the story” (Frank, 2000, p.354) which is the outcome of the way stories are interpreted. Hence, when Riessman (2004a and 2004b) argues that narratives indicate sequence and consequence, a teller’s selection, organisation and linking of events coupled with his or her evaluations, she is perhaps referring to how readers make sense of what stories may mean.

Now that a distinction between narrative and story has been established, what the term story might represent in this research is examined. Stories, according to Riessman (1993) and Connelly and Clandinin (1990), contain some form of chronology, of events, characters and actions. In that chronology is a plot that could either be strung together temporally, causally or thematically (Riessman, 1993). Temporally-ordered stories may signify a start, middle and end (Riessman 1993; Fludernik, 2009) or a past, present and future (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). Stories could also be depicted within a location, what some refer to as space (Riessman, 2008) or scene (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). Within first-person accounts in the context of a research interview, stories are elicited and

could be said to refer to a whole life story or narrow, topic-centred stories (Riessman, 2008). In this research, the term story is defined as to include all the above elements, namely the chronology, events, characters, actions located with the temporal, causal and thematic plots therein.

In the rest of this section, the theoretical perspective that underpins this research's methodology is made explicit. This is done by drawing on four philosophical stances commonly held by proponents of narrative inquiry. These philosophical stances, extensions from their earlier roots in literary (White, 1980) and historical studies (Bruner, 1991), represent contemporary arguments that followed late twentieth-century scholarly discovery and interests in the value of narratives in understanding reality (Mitchell, 1980). These philosophical stances hold possibilities and present limitations, although this section focuses primarily on their possibilities. Problems surrounding narrative inquiry as a methodology are discussed throughout section 4.2.3 and its limitations specifically addressed in section 4.2.3.2.

Firstly, proponents argue that people make sense of their experiences by telling stories about them (Riessman, 1993; Webster and Mertova, 2007; Connelly and Clandinin, 1990; Mishler, 1986; Seidman, 2006; Fludernik, 2009). Therefore, proponents view storytelling as a way in which people create order in their lives (Riessman, 1993), as an inevitable and natural form for people to convey how things happen (White, 1980) and in a manner that is relevant to the narrator (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). In essence, stories offer people a channel to make meaning from life experiences. White (1980) even suggests that the lack of a story points to a lack of meaning. In White's (1980) view, stories are not just *a* channel, but *the* channel for rendering life experience meaningful. However, not all proponents insist, explicitly at least, that stories represent the only means by which people generate meaning. They do, however, emphasize the predominance of a storied life in meaning-making.

Secondly, proponents view the act of telling stories as a meaning-making process (Seidman, 2006). This emphasis on process accentuates how stories-in-the-making is life-in-the-making. Therefore, stories are seen as active (re)constructions of life and its meanings. For instance, Riessman (1993) contends that people are perpetually casting their experiences under different and developing circumstances, and hence in new light. Since life events are constantly unfolding, Riessman (1993) adds, experiences and the meaning

people give them are never final. Relatedly, proponents also view stories as meaning-making structures (Polkinghorne, 1995). As such, narrative inquiry enables researchers to understand, at the particular instance, lived experience by the telling of the same.

Thirdly, proponents view stories as creating or constituting reality rather than simply referring to it. In this way, stories are not merely about external events as perceived by the narrator although external events help us understand the narrator's stories. For example, Bruner (2004) and Riessman (2008) suggest that stories themselves are how life experiences are made out to be instead of merely representing life experiences. Rather than supplying an objective truth or reality, stories represent people's experiential truth (Riessman, 1993). Stories are, Webster and Mertova (2007) argue succinctly, "a rendition of how life is perceived" (p.3). Consistent with the constructionist epistemology, stories and realities are also viewed as co-constructions (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). As stories potentially construct reality, reality in turn potentially constructs the stories that are told.

Fourthly, proponents view stories as representing a window into people's lives. For instance, some proponents argue that people's identities, personalities (Lieblich et al., 1998), beliefs, desires, theories and values (Bruner, 1991) are embedded in the stories they tell. As such, stories can be the "basis for *interpreting* why a character acted as he or she did" (Bruner, 1991, p.7) [emphasis in original text]. Of particular interest for this research is Riessman's (2008) suggestion that stories contain moral elements, that is, stories contain "a breach between ideal and real, self and society" (p.3). If so, and because the concept of spirituality in the workplace relates also to moral perspectives (see section 2.1.4), distinguishing the moral choices embedded in the participants' stories may represent a way for this research to assess their spiritual inclinations.

4.2.3 Methodology – Narrative inquiry

The third element in Crotty's (1998) framework is methodology, located after the element of theoretical perspective and prior to the element of method (see Figure 4.2). It is thus located because Crotty (1998) views methodology as shaped by theoretical perspective and as shaping the researcher's choice of method. As such, Crotty (1998) refers to methodology as the strategy, plan of action and design that flows from a set of theoretical

perspectives and that determine the specific choice of methods. In this section, three aspects relating to this research's methodology are discussed: (1) the focus of narrative inquiry, (2) the reasons for choosing narrative inquiry, and (3) limitations of narrative inquiry.

According to Riessman (1993), the central concern of narrative inquiry revolves around the issue of representation, that is, how stories are collected, interpreted and analysed, and how stories are presented by teller and listener. Other narrative researchers and theorists, such as Connelly and Clandinin (1990), Bruner (1991) and Lieblich et al. (1998), seem to raise similar concerns. Specifically, they explain that representation in narrative inquiry can be problematic because of our theoretical perspectives about stories. Firstly, stories are subjectively constructive. What this means is that every person conceives an event differently, constructing meaning from his personal and communal stock of stories. Secondly and relatedly, stories reflect process. People are continually making sense of their experiences, even at the time of telling, which may give the meaning people attach to their stories an ambiguous, fluid and contextual quality. Thirdly, stories are produced in interaction. That is, the stories people tell are shaped by both tellers and listeners, and the reciprocity that takes place during the telling.

In order to address these problematic areas, narrative researchers can design their methods to do three things. Firstly, Riessman (1993) suggests that the methods narrative researchers employ should cater to the variety, ambiguity, fluidity and context-driven nature of meaning derived in the participants' stories. This strategy helps researchers safeguard "the restorying quality" (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990, p.9) of the stories elicited during the research. Specifically, this strategy addresses the problematic area of how stories are subjectively constructive and reflect process.

Secondly, Riessman (2008) and Mishler (1986) suggest that researchers focus on how stories are jointly constructed by the participant and the researcher. While people tell stories for a purpose and to convey a particular meaning, the purpose and meaning stories take are also shaped by listeners. For instance, Riessman (2008) points out that the listeners' verbal cues shape the way tellers tell their stories, whether tellers illustrate their point or move on to another point. Additionally, tellers are tasked to convince their listeners of their stories and the meaning their stories carry (Riessman, 2008). As such, stories do not only help shape the tellers' experiences, stories are produced in conjunction

with listeners. The strategy of focusing on the joint construction of stories and their corresponding meanings addresses the problematic area of how stories are produced in interaction.

Thirdly, Riessman (2008) advises researchers to preserve the integrity of the story. If stories are subjectively constructive, are produced in interaction and reflect process, they should be preserved in order to reflect the way participants, in response to the researcher, construct meaning. For instance, presenting stories whole in the analysis, that is including the researcher's voice, represents a way to preserve the integrity of stories generated during the research. Also, this strategy seems consistent with what Maxwell (1996) refers to as 'contextualizing strategies' in qualitative data analysis. As opposed to coding analysis which tends to fracture data into smaller elements before being sorted into concepts and categories, contextualizing strategies attempts to understand the data in contexts (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Maxwell, 1996). Thus, narrative inquiry and its contextualizing strategic focus privileges the specific case and coherence *within the case* over the possible similarities *across cases* (Riessman 1993; Maxwell, 1996).

In the end however, Riessman (1993) explains that all representations are "incomplete, partial, and selective" (p.11). The strategies mentioned above are attempts researchers can make to address the issue of representing stories in research. These attempts may provide narrative researchers with a way to examine human experience and meaning via the stories people tell about them (Riessman, 1993).

4.2.3.1 Rationale for choosing narrative inquiry

Phenomenology as a methodology for this research was considered at the initial instance. This seemed like a natural choice since this research intended to examine the participants' 'experience' and the meaning they might attach to their experience of work. However, using phenomenology would have meant limiting the exploratory intent and scope of this research. According to Crotty (1998), the key defining features of phenomenology are: (1) the idea of intentionality, i.e. attention to the "things themselves" (p.78) or to "phenomena that present themselves immediately to us as conscious human beings" (p.78), and (2) the idea of revisiting phenomena with fresh eyes. These seem problematic since the implicit stance phenomenologists take is that there is something quite concrete known about the

phenomenon already for it is only in such circumstances that researchers will be able to suspend what they know for the investigation in order to develop new perspectives.

There is a greater need to explore what the participants' experience of work might be in this research than which seems possible with phenomenology. That is, this research does not assume to know exactly what events or which experiences it wants to collect. What might resemble spiritual well-being in the workplace may differ from participant to participant. As such, what was perhaps more appropriate for this research was a methodology that gave greater liberty to participants to frame for themselves what might be significant experiences of work. Additionally, the methodology of choice needed to capture the minutiae of the participants' experience without sacrificing its exploratory intent. It is with this 'liberty, depth and breadth' strategy that led this research to consider narrative inquiry.

There are two reasons why narrative inquiry was particularly suited as the methodology for this research. The first reason is the suitability of narrative inquiry to investigate spiritual inclinations and spiritual well-being. As discussed in Chapter 2, the concept of spirituality in the workplace seem to (1) centre on the individual, (2) relate to the individual's experience and way of being, and (3) refer to the individual's experience holistically, that is, in cognitive as well as affective ways. As a methodology, narrative inquiry seems fitting as a means to understand the experience of spiritual well-being as lived and told. Stories and the meaning embedded in them are thought to provide a window into the narrator's world – his or her experiences and ways of being in a holistic way. As such, narrative inquiry is deemed to be a relevant methodology. It has the potential to bring theoretical ideas about the nature of meaning-making to bear on the idea of spiritual well-being.

The second reason narrative inquiry is relevant for this research is its choice of the target participant group – sales representatives. In my experience, sales representatives frequently engage in 'talk' and are likely to be familiar with the conventions of storytelling. In fact, they can even be regarded as "professional narrators" (p.1), a term Fludernik (2009) assigns to people who are competent storytellers. However, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) warn researchers to be vigilant for the 'all-is-well-in-the-end' story plots when research engages competent storytellers as participants. Narrative researchers, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) add, ought to employ a critical eye such as to investigate what is told alongside what is not told. Aside from this caveat, approaching sales representatives with

the aim of generating stories of their experiences seems like a sound methodological and practical option for this research.

4.2.3.2 Limitations of narrative inquiry

It is perhaps prudent to examine also the limitations of the selected methodology since this will be the first step towards accounting for them. In this section, three limitations of narrative inquiry are discussed.

The first limitation is that stories are only “limited portraits” (Riessman, 1993, p. 15), a snapshot of people’s experiences and the meaning they give them. Webster and Mertova (2007) agree when they contend that research participants tell a story, not the whole story. As such, stories offer this research only a glimpse of the participants’ experience. Furthermore, Riessman (1993) reminds us that researchers will inevitably re-present and re-interpret the participants’ stories according to their research questions and aims. The issue of representation in narrative inquiry is necessary, its associated problems unavoidable. These re-constructed stories are all narrative researchers have to work with (Riessman, 1993).

The second limitation is that some experiences, according to Riessman (1993), may be difficult to narrate. Although Riessman (1993) refers to traumatic events such as an abortion and divorce, spiritual well-being may also be difficult to narrate for some participants. For instance, stories of spiritual inclinations may be suppressed if participants feel that the healthcare sales sector, their organisations or their peers do not endorse, encourage or tolerate such discourse at work. On the other hand, it is also possible that some participants view spiritual inclinations as a private matter left for personal reflection.

The third limitation is the contention of narrative researchers that not all stories are worth telling. Webster and Mertova (2007) argue that people might only recall and narrate moments that had an impact on their lives such as events that questioned one’s view of the world leading to a change in prior experience, understanding and future actions. This research was unable to assess whether participants had stories pertaining to their experience of spiritual well-being that were ‘worth telling’ before entering to the field. Nevertheless, if stories related to notions of spirituality in the workplaces were to be absent

from the interviews, that in it would have contributed to a research finding – that spiritual inclinations or spiritual well-being may have very little to do with the participant's work and successes at work.

4.2.4 Method – narrative interviews

The fourth and final element in Crotty's (1998) framework of the research process is method (see Figure 4.2). According to Crotty (1998), method refers to the detailed techniques or procedures a researcher plans to use and is the means by which the researcher attempts to answer the research questions. Additionally, Marshall and Rossman (1999) observe that the choice of research method is dependent upon the feasibility and efficiency of the selected techniques and procedures. Hence, the research method is described and its feasibility and efficiency examined in the following paragraphs. This section focuses solely on issues regarding data collection. Issues regarding the method of data analysis are discussed in section 4.6.3.

In order to collect data, the interview method, specifically in-depth interview (Marshall and Rossman, 1999) or qualitative interview (Maxwell, 1996; Bryman and Bell, 2011) informed by narrative inquiry was selected. This method was selected because it seemed unlikely that experiences related to spiritual inclinations and its interface with the need to meet work targets could have been efficiently collected using other methods; asking people about their experiences seemed like the most feasible way. Furthermore, Warren (2001) considers in-depth interview data to include the interviewee's "self, lived experiences, values and decisions, occupational ideology, cultural knowledge, or perspectives" (p.104), matters this research is interested in. In this sense, the qualitative interview represents a relevant method for this research. For ease of reference, the in-depth or qualitative interview informed by narrative inquiry will hereon be referred to as the narrative interview.

In order to encourage narration from the participants, the narrative interview method was conceived in two ways. Firstly, the procedure of the interview departed from the common 'question and answer' type of qualitative interviewing (Riessman, 2004b; Bryman and Bell, 2011; Mishler 1986). Instead, the narrative interviews responded to the participants' stories and the direction they took rather than responding to the researcher's interview

schedule (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Marshall and Rossman, 1999). Secondly, as a researcher using narrative inquiry, I adopted the perspective that the interviewer and interviewee “develop meaning together” (Riessman, 2002, p.248). As such, I (the interviewer) recognized that I was not merely a facilitator but was involved in the construction of the stories. Thus, in order for participants to develop *their* stories, I attempted to keep my intervention minimal (Squire, 2008).

While I could not divorce myself from the storytelling, the general stance during the interviews was to privilege the participants’ voice over mine. Hence, I tended to do two things: (1) allow space for the participants to develop their stories rather than to interrupt or to restrict the conversation, for instance, to prior themes or ideas, and (2) balance between exploring the participants’ experiences of work and seeking elaboration on stories that I thought shed light on the research questions. In these ways, the narrative interview was minimally structured. As such, the narrative interview method conceived for this research helped, to some extent, address the three problematic areas regarding the issue of representation in narrative inquiry (see section 4.2.3), which are: (1) how stories are subjectively constructive, (2) how stories are produced in interaction, and (3) how stories reflect process.

Thus far, the chapter has examined how a qualitative research fits the research aims (part 1 of this chapter). The subsequent discussions and linking of my epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and method served to help establish coherence between my most basic assumptions with how the research was to be carried out. The reasons for choosing narrative inquiry as the methodology, its strategies as well as its limitations have also been examined (part two of this chapter). In the next two sections, issues of validity and ethics (part three of this chapter), and their implications for this research are discussed.

4.3 Validity

The subject of validity often takes very contrasting forms for qualitative and quantitative researchers because they adopt different assumptions of the nature of the world they are investigating (Freeman et al., 2007). To this end, qualitative researchers have often sought to impose their versions of standards of validity instead of using the criteria of reliability and validity conceptualized by quantitative research (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Guba

and Lincoln, 1989; Horsburgh, 2003). However, Creswell and Miller (2000) comment that notions of validity in qualitative research and their corresponding criteria, such as credibility, dependability, auditability, confirmability and transferability, can be difficult to grasp because of the numerous and contrasting ways they can be conceived. Instead, the authors suggest that the emphasis on validity procedures in qualitative research may vary according to the lens of the evaluator (i.e. whether as researcher, study participant or as people external to the study) and the researcher's paradigm assumptions (i.e. whether as a researcher with postpositivist, constructionist or critical paradigm assumptions) (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2: Validity procedures within qualitative lens and paradigm assumptions

Lens/Paradigm assumptions	Postpositivist or Systematic Paradigm	Constructivist Paradigm	Critical Paradigm
Lens of the Researcher	Triangulation	Disconfirming evidence	Researcher reflexivity
Lens of Study Participants	Member checking	Prolonged engagement in the field	Collaboration
Lens of People External to the Study (Reviewers, Readers)	The audit trail	Thick, rich description	Peer debriefing

(Source: Creswell and Miller, 2000, p.126)

As a researcher with constructionist's lens and in reference to Creswell and Millers' (2000) framework, my focus on validity procedures would reside primarily in 'disconfirming evidence', 'prolonged engagement in the field', and 'thick, rich description'. Nonetheless, validity procedures, Creswell and Miller (2000) point out, could also depend on their practical use.

While the framework may assist researchers to remain coherent with their paradigm assumptions, Freeman et al. (2007) warns that the issue of validity in qualitative research should not be limited to ticking items off a checklist. Although there is no established consensus on the criteria for validity in qualitative research, Freeman et al. (2007) observe that standards for validity in qualitative research traditionally vary according to different methodologies, theoretical frameworks and substantial issues under investigation. Keeping these in mind and following Maxwell (1996), I discuss the processes that resembled

validity procedures this research underwent by examining three possible validity threats: threats to valid description, threats to valid interpretation and threats to valid theory. After that, validity as it relates specifically to narrative inquiry is discussed.

4.3.1 Threats to validity

According to Maxwell (1996), threats to valid description during data collection can occur when methods do not accurately capture what transpired and what was said. To a considerable extent, this threat to valid description in this research was addressed since the plans were to audio-record all the interviews. Executing this plan however was not straightforward.

Firstly, some participants' extended their responses to the interview questions even after, or perhaps because, the audio-recording was stopped. In this case, what I did was to document my reflections of these interview moments in the research journal and to revisit them at relevant stages during the research, such as when I was preparing for the second interviews and during data analysis. Secondly, one participant refused to have the interview recorded. In this case, I wrote down the participant's interview responses during the interviews and audio-recorded instead a re-enacted (verbal) version of the interviews based on the interview notes²⁴. The other strategy I used to help counter the threat to valid description was to conduct two interviews with each participant, thereby extending my collaboration with them. This could be considered as what Creswell and Miller (2000) term 'prolonged engagement in the field' (see Table 4.2).

Threats to valid description also potentially occur beyond data collection. According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), methodological shifts can occur anytime throughout the process of conducting qualitative research, characteristic of its emergent nature. To help counter this threat, I documented my reflections and emerging ideas about the research design, methodology, methods, research questions, research purposes, analysis and findings so that they were available for review. Research journals of this kind, Marshall and Rossman (1999) suggest, can serve as a retraceable record of the design and rationale of decisions made in the research, thereby permitting reanalysis. In one instance, reviewing my notes

²⁴ Analysis of this case was to be carried out in a way that accounted for the added interpretative layer in the data.

regarding data analysis resulted in a conceptual shift of how the term ‘story’ was defined in the research (see section 4.6.3.1).

With regard to threats to a valid description, the attempts of this research seem reasonably consistent with the validity procedure Creswell and Miller (200) refer to as ‘thick, rich description’ (see Table 4.2) as well as with the evolving rationale and decisions on the design of the research. The goal throughout the research was to strengthen, in Miles and Huberman’s (1994) terms, dependability or auditability of the research. In turn, this validity procedure may assist in enhancing transferability of the research findings, what Guba and Lincoln (1989) refer to as the availability of sufficient detail relating to models, theoretical parameter, methods, analysis and findings upon which another researcher could decide if the findings would be applicable in another setting.

Qualitative researchers, according to Maxwell (1996), should also be cautious of possible threats to valid interpretation. This, Maxwell (1996) adds, includes instances where researchers impose their own perspectives onto what participants said or did. The methodology and method of narrative inquiry, as conceived in this research, addresses this threat to a considerable extent. As discussed in section 4.2.3, the distinctive element of narrative inquiry is giving voice to the participants. Thus, the aim of this research was to strive towards allowing participants and their stories to do the telling rather than impose its perspectives on them. However, this can be problematic because qualitative researchers, according to Guba and Lincoln (1989), do not enter into the inquiry with a blank mind. In fact, the general view of qualitative research, particularly apparent from a constructionist epistemology, is that researchers and participants construct meaning together. As such, “(t)here is no “pure” or “raw” data, uncontaminated by human thought or action” (Freeman et al., 2007, p.27).

Instead of adopting a neutral position, qualitative researchers on the whole attempt to be reflexive, what Horsburgh (2003) describes as the “active acknowledgement by the researcher that her/his own actions and decisions will inevitably impact upon the meaning and context of the experience under investigation” (p.308). Creswell and Miller (2000) also cited ‘researcher reflexivity’ in their framework (see Table 4.2), which for them meant that researchers make explicit their position on the matter under study early in the research and then proceed to bracket or suspend them as research progresses. However, the activity of bracketing seemed difficult to implement since my position on the matter under

investigation evolved alongside the research. What I attempted instead was to make my interpretive decisions as transparent as possible for the reader and to show how the interpretations are grounded in the data. Attempts in this respect may have assisted what Miles and Huberman (1994) refer to as the confirmability criteria of the research, that is, the degree to which the data confirms the research findings.

The final threat described by Maxwell (1996) is the threat to valid theory, which includes whether researchers considered possible alternative explanations to the study phenomenon or to its conclusions. The validity procedure Creswell and Miller (2000) refer to as ‘disconfirming evidence’ (see Table 4.2) seem to help counter this threat. In this research, finding discrepant data or negative instances seemed partly inbuilt in the methodology since narrative inquiry is focused on multiple rather than on a single truth (Riessman, 2008) and on what is not said in addition to what is said. Hence, possible alternative perspectives in the participants’ stories were also sought. It is from this exploration of the participants’ stories, which include confirming as well as disconfirming evidence that the research findings are based on.

Threats to valid theory in this research were also considered prior to and after initial data analysis. For instance, the (working) conceptual framework, research questions, methodology and methods were tested in several settings. These settings include meetings with my supervisory team, oral and poster presentations at the British Association for the Study of Spirituality (BASS) Conferences, Anglia Ruskin University’s (ARU) Annual Research Student Conference, ARU’s university-level research student workshops and ARU Business School’s doctoral workshops, and during informal discussions with peers in the PhD program. These activities resemble what Creswell and Miller (2000) term as ‘peer debriefing’ (see Table 4.2). These strategies to address possible threats to valid theory would have assisted the quality criteria of credibility of the research, that is, whether findings are credible to the readers (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

4.3.2 Validity in narrative inquiry

Much of the issues regarding validity in narrative inquiry mirror the discussion in the preceding subsection. Firstly, quality in narrative inquiry research is differentiated from the notions of validity and reliability typically used in quantitative research. Instead, other

notions of quality, such as transferability (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990) and trustworthiness (Riessman, 2008), are used. Secondly, procedures to strengthen quality in narrative inquiry research parallel many of the validity procedures generally applied in qualitative research. For instance, Riessman (2008) advises that claims for quality in narrative inquiry, among others, depend on whether theoretical arguments are grounded in participants' stories, whether alternative interpretations are assessed and on attentive documentation of data collection and interpretive processes. Notwithstanding these similarities, there are two additional aspects of validity related specifically to narrative research that warrants closer examination.

According to Riessman (2008), validity in narrative research can be viewed as trustworthiness in re-presenting the data, conveyed by means of developing coherence of the accounts and meanings participants tell in their stories. The need to develop coherence of participants' stories is also echoed by Connelly and Clandinin (2000). The authors contend that "(n)arrative explanation derives from the whole" (Connelly and Clandinin, 2000, p.7), hinting at the need for consistency between the larger points participants make and the individual stories they tell. However, coherence in narrative research can be problematic on two fronts. Firstly, the meaning of texts, Riessman (2002) cautions, can shift according to writer, reader and their historical contexts. As such, the notion of coherence may differ from one person to another person, making trustworthiness ambiguous.

Secondly, coherence within participants' stories is predicated upon the notion of a unitary self, a view some researchers, including Riessman (2008), challenge. Apart from the notion of coherence, Riessman (2008) argues that trustworthiness in narrative research may also be reflected by the degree to which participants' stories correspond to the researcher's interpretation of them.

Trustworthiness perhaps can be exhibited provided narrative researchers develop their interpretations based on the accounts in participants' stories, whether these accounts appear coherent or incoherent to the researcher. This was what this research attempted to do as it seemed consistent with the overarching idea in its methodology to give voice to and empower participants in their storytelling. In the end, validity in narrative research, according to Riessman (2008), requires researchers to "present their narrative data in ways that demonstrate the data are genuine, and analytic interpretations of them are plausible,

reasonable, and convincing (Riessman, 2008, p.191). My attempts at trustworthiness, as examined above, are hopefully visible to the reader in the analysis and findings chapters.

4.4 Ethics

This section examines what Miles and Huberman (1994) refer to as the “rightness or wrongness of our [research] actions” (p.288). Because of the evolving and emergent nature of qualitative research, such as in its conceptualisation and processes, Miles and Huberman (1994) advise researchers to consider ethical issues on a constant rather than on a one-off basis. However, the task surrounding issues of ethics in research, according to some qualitative research methods texts (e.g., Patton, 2002; Bryman and Bell, 2011) is not to anticipate every single ethical dilemma and conflict. Instead, Bold (2012) suggests that qualitative researchers develop a predisposition to examine the potential harm and benefit the research may have on others and to reduce potential harm while increasing potential benefits. In the following paragraphs, the ethics processes this research underwent are described, beginning with the more general issues to issues that are related specifically to the methodology, and includes an assessment of their potential harm and benefit.

Formal ethics approval for this research was obtained from Anglia Ruskin University’s Faculty (Business School) Research Ethics Panel on the 7th of February in 2013 (see Appendix B). In the application, details about the research, including its plans concerning the empirical approach, participant selection, the potential risks anticipated including ways to mitigate them, consent taking, as well as the proposals regarding ways to ensure confidentiality and anonymity were provided. The application process gave this research the chance to vigorously examine ethical issues. As the research progressed, these and other unanticipated ethical issues became apparent. They are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Prior to the interviews, the participants were briefed on the research using the participant information sheet (see Appendix C) so that participants were, as much as possible, clear about their roles. Voluntary consent was also sought from them using and subsequently obtaining their signatures on the participant consent form (see Appendix D). Carrying out these protocols diligently helped this researcher convey to the participants the ethical standards the research abided by. Doing so may have indicated that this research’s interest

in collecting data equalled its emphasis on their rights, that is, the participants' rights to privacy, confidentiality, anonymity, and to withdraw consent.

Relatedly, there did not seem to be any need to be covert or deceptive about the research or its topic aside from providing too much information and unduly colouring their perspectives on the subject matter. As such, all communication with the participants reflected the researcher's stance to be as honest and as transparent as possible. In retrospect, these became the first steps I took towards building research relationships where potential harm to participants was anticipated and managed while setting the stage for the research to obtain quality data.

However, issues of confidentiality and anonymity in practice were not simple tasks in this research. Firstly, I was acquainted with six of the participants and they were also acquainted with each other. As such, I had to exercise extra sensitivity in discussing other participants' experiences especially when initiated by any of these six participants. Secondly, as Bold (2012) explains, the display of narrative data typically involves a lot of details – extended accounts of events and experiences – that might include other people, what they did, what they said and how they felt. As such, the presentation of data in narrative research may complicate the researcher's efforts to ensure participants are not identifiable from the data. Nevertheless, the potential risks of the participants being identified from the data presented in this thesis seems significantly lower had all the participants been selected from a single team or from an organisation, or had I conducted this research in the organisation I was working with and was required to present the research findings therein.

There are two other important ethical concerns specific to this research. The first is the potential harm the interviews may have on the participants. Patton (2002) argues that research interviews are interventions. As such, they have the potential to affect participants and their lives. For instance, Patton (2002) expects that the guarantee of confidentiality and anonymity may encourage participants to say more than initially intended. The reflective process of the interview, Patton (2002) adds “leaves [the participants] knowing things about themselves that they didn't know – or at least were not fully aware of – before the interview” (p.405). This is perhaps more acute in narrative research, Bold (2012) adds, where the use of smaller participant numbers may likely mean that interviews are more in-depth and interview processes are more intrusive. In practice, it was nearly impossible to

predict beforehand whether the participants may experience such moments. Even if it were to be observed, it seems unclear whether it would be prudent for researchers to redirect the conversation away from them. What this research instead attempted was, following Ali and Kelly's (2004) advice, to encourage participants to say as much as they were comfortable to reveal while offering them the option to erase sections of the interviews at a later time.

The second important ethical concern is that while the narrative methodology claims to 'give voice' to participants, the final interpretation of their stories resides outside their jurisdiction. In order to redress the dominance of the researchers' interpretation over the participants', Riessman (2008) suggests that narrative researchers return analyses and findings to their participants for comments. This strategy may serve to help researchers align their interpretations with what participants mean to tell with their stories. However, Riessman (2008) cautions researchers to bear in mind that meanings from their participants' stories are not static; meaning evolves with time, reflection and newer experiences. Additionally, participants do not have access to stories told by other participants and as such, comments from the single participant may not reflect the totality of the experiences of all the participants.

Nonetheless, Riessman's (2008) suggestion makes sense since the strategy generates elaboration, clarification and newer meanings for narrative researchers. However, it must correspond with the resources available to the narrative researcher. In this research, I decided against eliciting comments from the participants about the emerging analyses and findings because it would have generated too much additional data which I would not have been able to analyse. Thus, it seemed less respectful and ethical to obtain additional data from the participants when it was not going to be used.

The final point in this section concerns the potential benefit this research may have had for the participants. In the ethics application to Anglia Ruskin University's Faculty (Business School) Research Ethics Panel, it was suggested that the interviews offered participants the opportunity for self-reflection about their work. From a narrative theoretical perspective, it may have enabled participants to explore the meaning of their work, if they were so inclined, and if the interview contexts suited them. This seemed to have been the case for three of the participants since they explicitly expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to reflect on their work during the interviews. Another two participants saw their

participation as a way to enrich the research and its findings, which was perhaps an avenue for them to use their professional experience to benefit others.

4.5 Field work

This section is the fourth part of this chapter. In this section, four aspects of field work are examined, beginning with the sampling strategy followed by participant access, the research relationship and the interviews. For each of these aspects, this section describes what transpired, how the idea behind each aspect evolved in the field and how they implicate the collection of data.

4.5.1 Purposeful sampling

The purposeful sampling strategy was used in this research. According to Maxwell (1996), the strategy of purposeful sampling is to deliberately select exemplar cases, individuals with experience of the phenomenon that provide critical data that cannot be found with other cases or individuals. In other words, the strategy seeks participants that “manifest(s) the phenomenon intensely” (Marshall and Rossman, 1999, p.73). As such, participants are said to be selected based on theory and on a priori research design (Warren, 2001). Specific to this research, the case or unit of analysis is the individual person and his or her stories about what they may be spiritually-inclined towards, work targets and work performance.

But, the purposeful sampling strategy in this research was applicable only up to a point. This is because the strategy suggests that only potential participants who considered spiritual strivings a significant part of their work were to be selected, which could not be ascertained prior to speaking at length with them. As a result of this limitation, the recruitment of participants for this research was not as targeted as the purposeful sampling strategy would have suggested. Hence, the research faced the potential risks of collecting insufficient data and/or irrelevant data. Nonetheless, I was prepared to extend the data collection phase until sufficient relevant data was collected. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), the decision on the number of participants recruited for a study depends on the complexity of the cases and whether ‘theoretical saturation’ is reached. What this

meant was that researcher should proceed with recruiting participants until no new theories emerge with subsequent interviews (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

In retrospect, achieving theoretical saturation proved difficult to determine. Until the data has been analysed substantially, it seemed almost impossible to ascertain whether enough data had been collected. As such, what this research relied on to determine whether adequate data was collected were the diversity and depth of stories told during the interviews. Miles and Huberman (1994) advise that data may be difficult to handle with 15 or so highly complex cases. Lieblich et al. (1998) also warns of data overload since narrative interviews generate a lot of data for transcription and analyses. The research bore these in mind as data was collected.

Notwithstanding the above limitation of purposeful sampling for this research, the sampling strategy used was purposeful in three ways. That is, I sought participants who met three criteria. The first criterion is that potential participants were healthcare sales representatives from multinational healthcare sales organisations in Malaysia (see section 3.4). The second criterion is that potential participants have met their sales targets for at least three consecutive years or for at least three years out of a span of five years. This second criterion meant that only sales representatives who demonstrated consistent sales achievements were selected, which corresponded with the aim to sample the experiences of ground-level employees that demonstrate good and genuine work performance (see section 3.3). The third criterion was that potential participants were willing to talk about what work meant to them (see Research Poster in Appendix A). In the final tally, 16 potential candidates were contacted and 12 of them interviewed. The data from 11 participants were deemed usable for the research. Data from one participant was omitted from analysis because the participant did not meet the consistent sales achievement criterion.

4.5.2 Participant Access

The field work phase lasted four months, from March 2013 until June 2013. Contrary to initial plans, healthcare sales companies were not approached directly to gain access to potential participants. This is because my industry peers advised against it. In their view, companies will not encourage their staff to take part because companies generally fear that sensitive and confidential information may be disclosed. Research posters were also

distributed to two healthcare product distribution centres although this method did not yield any results. Hence, access to potential participants was gained in two other ways. Firstly, I contacted my peers in the healthcare sales industry in Malaysia. This was the main access method since I had worked in the healthcare sales industry in Malaysia from 1997 to 2010. Secondly, I contacted friends and family members who had contact with people in the industry.

All participants interviewed for the research were recommended by their immediate line managers except for one participant, who was approached by me directly. Once identified and permission granted, potential participants were contacted initially via an email. The intent of the email was to: (1) introduce myself as a researcher, (2) introduce the research and (3) assess the potential participant's interest in taking part in the research. In order to avoid unnecessary pressure for them to take part, particularly since their managers recommended them, it was explicitly noted in the email that participation was entirely voluntary and that all communication would be kept confidential. Only after potential participants replied affirmatively did further arrangements for the interviews made.

4.5.3 Researcher-participant relationship

Two issues about the researcher-participant relationship are discussed in this section. The first relates to generic issues such as collaboration and reciprocity in the research relationship. The second relates to specific issues such as the influences of my insider-outsider position and my acquaintance with the participants.

According to Marshall and Rossman (1999), building trusting relationships with participants is an important issue for researchers using in-depth qualitative interviews because interviews are built on collaboration. This research views the first contact point between the researcher and participant to be an important moment for setting up a collaborative research relationship. Efforts to mitigate potential harm to participants, as discussed in section 4.4 on research ethics, may also enhance collaboration. Following Johnson's (2001) advice, the research and research expectations were made explicit to all participants at the start of the interviews. In order to avoid being coercive, ample time was given for participants to respond to the request for participation and communicated time lapse agreed upon before participants were re-contacted. In the attempt to respect the

participants' time invested in the project, the research was flexible, opened to rescheduling and responded promptly to all communication with them.

But, the research relationship can also be reciprocal. While participants offered up their stories, the research in turn offered participants the opportunity for self-knowledge and reflection on their work and their work achievements. According to Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009), "the process of sharing stories of meaningful work and life with others reinforced the existential significance of one's life and work" (p.503). Again, the reciprocity of the research relationship is related to the ethical issue of potential benefit the research may have had for participants.

However, the issue of the research relationship in this study is complicated by two additional issues. Firstly, I am familiar with the healthcare sales industry in Malaysia. As such, I am an insider, technically competent in the business, practices and language healthcare sales representatives engage in. Secondly, six of the participants were acquainted to me prior to the interviews. In the following subsections, my position as an insider and as an acquaintance, as well as these positional influences on the research will be examined.

4.5.3.1 Insider-outsider position

Before I proceed to examine the advantages and disadvantages of my position as an insider or outsider to the participants, it is perhaps expedient to explain my insider-outsider status in greater detail. I have worked in healthcare sales industry in Malaysia for 13 years. My experience in the industry is fairly wide. I have worked in the pharmaceutical as well as the medical device sales sectors; I have covered the general practitioner, retail pharmacy and hospital market sectors. I also have experience working across seven states in Malaysia, some of which overlapped with the participants' sales territories. However, the industry is fairly large. The situation where participants mentioned clients or peers whom I personally have encountered in my work did not dominate the interview conversations.

For a researcher, being an insider has its advantages. In this research, it had two distinct advantages. Firstly, an insider position facilitated efficient communication during the research interview since I enjoyed language, behavioural and socio-cultural competence.

This enabled me to comprehend “the full complexity of the social world at hand” (Hockey, 1993, p.205). Secondly, the insider position helped me gain greater depth of the stories the participants told during their interviews (Coar and Sim, 2006). Participants were able to expand on issues beyond the superficial because the participants spent less time clarifying or explaining work or work-related contexts and technical terms.

On the other hand, being an insider has its disadvantages. Hockey (1993) suggests how an overt familiarity on the researcher’s part leads to biases or blind spots. In contrast, participants may have been more explicit and hence provided greater detail during their interviews when researchers were perceived as outsiders. Hence, it is possible that the background knowledge and shared understanding between participants and researchers who are insiders shape the interview conversations “towards some areas and away from others” (Platt, 1981, p. 80). As a result, interview data where the interviewer is an insider may, in Platt’s (1981) view, end up thinner.

Nonetheless, Hockey (1993) also asserts that researchers are only insiders, or outsiders, to a degree and on certain respects. What this means is that the insider-outsider position a researcher occupies in his or her research varies. Perhaps then it is more appropriate to consider the insider-outsider researcher position as what Dwyer and Buckle (2009) refer to as a ‘space’ a researcher occupies rather than an immutable position the researcher is accorded with. To this end, it might be useful to assess the degree to which I am an insider and the degree to which I am an outsider to my participants.

I occupied the position of an insider when the participants considered my work background and experiences to share similarities with theirs. This insider position was not accorded at a single moment in the research relationship as much as it was established over time during my interaction with the participants. In my case, for instance, I established myself as an insider to the participants when the distinctiveness of a market of industry sector the participant referred to was apprehended by me, thus requiring very little further explanation from them. However, my insider position faded when participants referred to therapeutic areas or organisation-specific issues I have little knowledge about. These moments would have been made obvious when I sought clarification or demonstrated a lack of understanding of what they said.

In general, however, I occupied the position of an outsider when participants related to me their work experiences and the meanings these work experiences have for them since I have very little insight into their personal experiences of work. Thus, the insider-outsider space I as a researcher occupied was contingent upon the specific issues discussed during the interview. On the whole, the combination of my insider status and my outsider status seemed to have enabled stories of their experiences of work to be developed to a considerable extent during the interviews.

4.5.3.2 Acquaintance and non-acquaintance

When participants are acquainted with the researcher, and interviewer in this case, additional methodological issues are raised. At this point, it might be appropriate for me to describe my acquaintance with six of the participants. All six participants were ex-colleagues from one healthcare sales company, where I had worked at for two years. At the time of the interviews, five of them were still working in the said healthcare sales company while one participant had moved to another healthcare sales company. During my employment at the said company, I worked in the same team with two of the participants while the other four participants were from a different team. I refer to them as acquaintances since I have only known them as colleagues and not outside of work.

Platt (1981) raises several issues regarding the situation of interviewing one's peers. Although Platt drew these issues within the academic context and from the relationship between academics, she nonetheless highlights some issues for this research. Among them, two issues seem pertinent. Firstly, participants who are acquainted with the interviewer may be tempted to portray well of themselves. In return, the interviewer may be eager to reciprocate by concurring far too easily and quickly to the participants' responses. Secondly, there may be sensitive issues that might be awkward to pose or get a response to when the interviewer and participant are acquainted. These two issues bring to light the blurred roles of both parties of the interview event. For participants, they might grapple with whether and when they respond as a participant or as an acquaintance. The interviewer might face a similar dilemma.

The blurred roles indeed posed a technical challenge during the interviews. Customary perhaps of acquaintances, as opposed to non-acquaintances, the acquainted participants and

I occasionally engaged in friendly talk prior to, during or after the interview. At times, these friendly talks extended to questions about the interview and research topic. In fact, I found myself in a position where the acquainted participants launched into stories that I was eager to capture on audio although formal introductory procedures, such as explaining the research using the participant information sheet and getting the participants' informed consent, had yet to be carried out. This issue was mitigated when I switched to the role of a researcher as soon as acquainted participants started to launch into storytelling. It may have been abrupt and awkward but the participants seemed to understand. And in order not to lose what participants had begun to story earlier, I requested that they repeat their story.

The other issue was whether and to what extent acquainted participants were able to tell me stories about what work meant to them candidly. For instance, it was likely that acquainted participants considered issues of propriety during the interviews since we had common acquaintances. Additionally, our previous working relationship may have influenced the extent to which participants were comfortable to reveal their personal stories to me. But it is at this point when I realized that the distinction between participants who were acquaintances and participants who were not acquaintances blur.

For example, some acquainted participants seemed more candid with their responses than other acquainted participants and some non-acquainted participants. Likewise, some non-acquainted participants seemed more candid than other non-acquainted participants and even some acquainted participants. As I examined my status as a researcher/interviewer to the participants, as an acquaintance or non-acquaintance, the impact of these distinctions on the interview seemed to transcend the clearly demarcated researcher-participant relationship boundaries discussed here. For instance, non-acquainted participants, particularly after describing personal stories of their work, sometimes ended up more like somebody I was acquainted with.

In the larger scheme of the research interviews, it is difficult to ascertain what participants, acquaintances and non-acquaintances alike, include and exclude in their interview responses. As far as I can recall, the topic of meaning of work and spirituality had never been a topic the acquainted participants and I had explicitly engaged in. If issues of the meaning of their work had implicitly surfaced during our earlier interaction, neither the acquainted participant nor I seem cognizant of them. Moreover, there was very little perceived 'right or wrong' type of answer to the interview questions. Neither was I seeking

specific stories from the participants. Asking participants what work meant to them invited telling, or a re-telling in cases where these issues surfaced before for participants.

There are two additional issues I would like to address in this section. Firstly, the six participants I was acquainted with were also acquainted with each other. This was especially relevant as five of them were, at the time of interview, in the same team and in the same company. It was not possible for me to dictate whether these five participants exchanged views about the interviews although I am aware some of them did. Secondly, my sampling group perhaps contravened conventional wisdom on ways to ensure sampling diversity among participants because five out of a total of 11 participants came from a single team in a single company. Nonetheless, these five participants' stories were very different from each other's. In fact, the diversity of the stories captured from a group of employees working in a similar work environment contributed to a significant finding.

Platt (1981) argues that interviewers ought to examine and make explicit the social influences embedded in their methods and in their selection of participants regardless whether the interviewer occupies an insider or outsider space, or is acquainted or not with the participant. This is because what is 'strange' and what is 'familiar' varies even among peers (Hockey, 1993). Thus, I have attempted to make explicit my position as a researcher/interviewer in the preceding paragraphs. In the next section, issues specific to the interview are examined.

4.5.4 Interviews

There are three parts to this subsection: (1) how the interviews were conducted, (2) the interview protocol, its conception and its development in the field, and (3) my reflections about the interview activity.

All participants were interviewed twice. The reason for conducting two interviews for each participant instead of just one was to extend this research's collaboration with the participant. According to Riessman (2008), participants' stories may need time to develop and hence repeat interviews are ideal. For instance, the second interview enabled this research to seek verification or elaboration on what was said in the first interview. The average interview time is approximately two hours per participant across two interviews.

All interviews were conducted face-to-face except for one second interview which was conducted via Skype. All interviews were audio-recorded except for one participant, an issue that was addressed in section 4.3.1.

The interview protocol was developed based on Maxwell's (1996) advice. He suggests that researchers clearly differentiate research questions from interview questions, the former being "what you want to understand" while the latter being "what you ask people in order to gain that understanding" (Maxwell, 1996, p.74). The initial interview protocol was piloted during a faculty-level research methods workshop at Anglia Ruskin University. The workshop was facilitated by an academic staff and attended by the faculty's research degree candidates. Following feedback from the workshop, the interview protocol that was used in the field was developed (see Appendix E).

The interview questions were designed to be open-ended. The first interview consisted of interview questions that were designed to elicit responses along two broad areas. The first area is the participant's employment history. The second area is the participant's work experiences. Sample interview questions in the second area include 'What do you enjoy most about your work?', 'Describe a time when you did not meet your sales targets?' and 'Why did you choose a healthcare sales job?' The second interview consisted of interview questions that probed for two other areas. The intent of the first area is to revisit the participants' work experiences, especially ones which were not covered during the first interview. The intent of the second is to explore selected events, experiences or comments participants made in the first interview in depth. The second interview ended by asking participants if they had additional comments to add followed by debriefing the participants.

The interview questions faced continuous, albeit minor, revisions in the field. Relatedly, interview questions that were thought to successfully prompt rich and detailed stories were more likely used during subsequent interviews. As Miles and Huberman (1994) note, the qualitative researcher "learn(s) how to ask a question in the site's terms and to look with new eyes" (p.38). Ultimately, the interview protocol functioned more as a guide than a checklist. The use of interview questions was flexible. These were in keeping with the emergent and responsive nature of a narrative (in-depth, qualitative) interview and qualitative research design (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

As I reflected on the interview process, I realized that the kinds of responses participants provided were subject of influences other than the interview questions. For instance, open-ended interview questions did not necessarily prompt rich and detailed stories. On the other hand, close-ended questions did not necessarily limit storytelling from the participants. Instead, an elaborate response from the participants depended on two aspects. The first aspect was whether the narrative interviewing technique suited participants. When it did, participants usually spoke candidly and at length about their experiences. When narrative interviewing did not suit the participant, responses were usually brief and/or summarized. The result was that, for the latter group of participants, I may have ended up probing more than what I had initially planned to.

The second aspect that elicited an elaborate response from the participants was my (the interviewer's) response during the interviews. This second aspect is mentioned by Riessman (2008); she notes that "(t)he specific wording of a question is less important than the interviewer's emotional attentiveness and engagement and the degree of reciprocity in the conversation" (p.24). I realized that showing a genuine interest in listening to the participants' experiences was more important than the questions I asked if I wanted participants to develop *their* stories. For example, there were instances where my (impromptu) close-ended statements triggered extended responses. These incidences perhaps depict how genuine interest, demonstrated by 'attentiveness' and 'engagement' during the interviews, drew extended responses despite the use of close-ended questions (see Section 5.3.2.1). As such, the primary concern of researchers using narrative interviewing techniques should be to really listen to and follow the participants' stories rather than be overly concerned about which questions to ask or to redirect the participants' storytelling.

4.6 Rationalizing the analytic process

This fifth and final part of the chapter relates to the process of data analysis. But before that, it is perhaps useful to remind the reader of the research's narrative focus. The research is concerned with first-person narratives. It is biographical in a sense that it attempts to develop extended accounts of part of the participants' lives. The research's intent is to explore the thematic, causal and temporal elements located in the chronology, events, characters and actions embedded in the stories participants tell. The 'story' is placed within

the person; the unit of analysis or case is the individual participant, specifically the stories he or she develops with me over the course of two interviews. As such, the interviews are seen as a space for participants to develop accounts of their lives, keeping in mind that participants develop accounts of their lives also as a response to the interviewer.

This part of the chapter is comprised of three subsections. The analytic framework and analytic process are described and explained in the first and second subsections. The third subsection clarifies how the data is analysed and includes a revised definition of the term ‘story’ in the research. Jointly, these three subsections show how data analysis was rationalised and systematised.

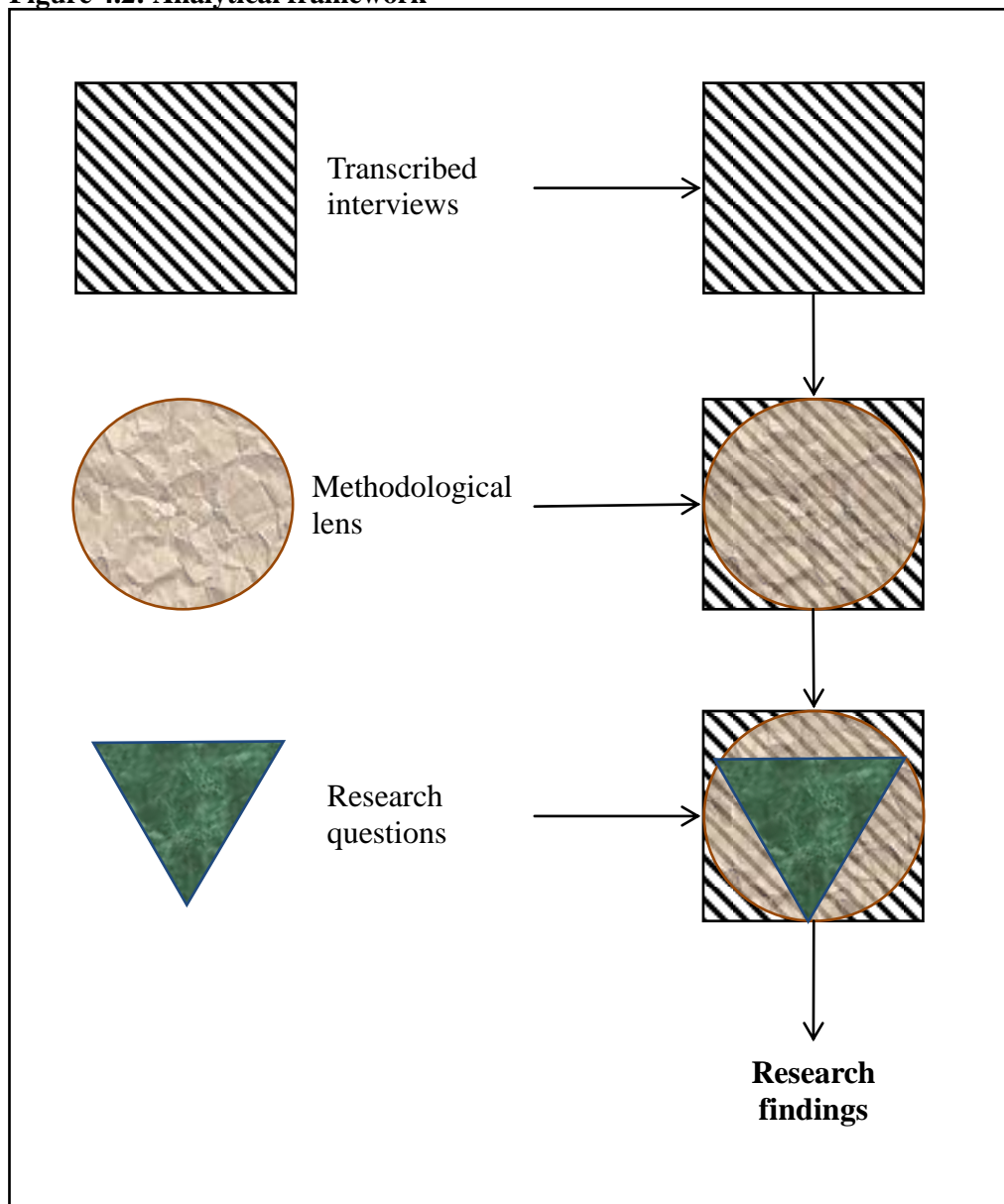
4.6.1 Analytic framework

There are two objectives in this section. The first is to describe the analytic framework. The second is to explain the purpose of the analytic framework. Each is discussed in turn in the following paragraphs.

The analytic framework is conceived to be comprised of three elements. The first element of the analytic framework is the *transcribed interviews*. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and represent the raw data, the source upon which the research findings are based. The second element is the research’s *methodological lens*, that is, narrative inquiry. As such, the participants’ stories represent the core aspect of the analysis. The third element of the analytic framework is the *research questions*, which represents the specific empirical aim of the research.

The analytic framework was conceived as the combination of all three elements, specifically the sequential application of the second and third element on the first element. For example, the research questions (the third element) are applied in the analysis only after the methodological lens (the second element) has been applied onto the transcribed interview (the first element). The research findings were developed from the combination of all three elements. Figure 4.2 is a graphical presentation of the analytic framework.

Figure 4.2: Analytical framework



The purpose of the analytic framework was twofold. Firstly, it provided a systematic way for this research to analyse the data. For instance, the analytic framework dictated that the transcribed interviews (the first element) were revisited in order that what constituted a story (the second element, i.e. when a story started or ended, which segments of talk were to be combined to form the larger narrative) could be reconfigured in the light of newer ideas or emerging themes before the research questions (third element) were (re)posed onto the data. In this way, the analytic framework kept the analysis grounded in what the participants said and provided the research with a consistent way to move back and forth between my emerging findings and the transcribed interviews. In addition to being systematic, this analytic framework is consistent with established narrative analytic methods where narrative researchers get a feel for the depth and breadth of the

participants' stories (Bazeley, 2013; Riessman, 2008) prior to imposing the research questions on the data.

Secondly, the analytic framework helped the research to be coherent with its epistemology, theoretical perspectives and research purposes. Specifically, I was able to incorporate my constructionist epistemological assumptions and the theoretical perspectives of narrative inquiry into the data analysis via the methodological lens (second element). This research was also guided by the research purposes in the process of data analysis via the research questions (third element). Thus, the analytic framework integrated the main elements of the research, thereby enhancing coherence of analytic process with the fundamental perspectives and aims of the research.

4.6.2 Analytic process

In this section, the process of data analysis is explained. According to Bazeley (2013), analysis typically begins as soon as a researcher reviews the data. In this case, the audio recording of every first interview was reviewed in order to prepare for the second interview. As such, data analysis took place during the data collection phase. However, the process of data analysis during and after the data collection phase was different. In the following paragraphs, the way data was analysed during these two different phases is described.

During the data collection phase, data analysis consisted of three main activities: (1) listening to the audio recording of the first interview, (2) getting a sense of the overall narrative, and (3) noting down my tentative ideas. The purposes of analysis at this point was to familiarise myself with the participants' talk and to prepare for the second interview. It is at this point where I, for instance, decide whether to revisit participants' stories or to explore further what participants said during the first interview.

After the data collection phase, the data was analysed in three stages. Stage 1 of the analytic process was where I transcribed and explored what the participants said during the first and second interviews. The main purpose of the analysis in stage 1 was to gain a broad sense of what participants may be saying without applying the methodological lenses and the research questions. Doing so ensured that the participants' voice was privileged at the

first instance. The main activities were: (1) listening to audio recording of interviews, (2) transcribing the interviews verbatim, (3) getting a sense of the overall narrative and (4) noting tentative ideas. Riessman (2002) advises narrative researchers to start with a rough transcription, “a first draft of the entire interview that gets the words and other striking features of the conversation on paper (e.g., crying, laughing, very long pauses)” (p.249). These rough transcriptions offered me the opportunity to develop my first impressions of what the participants may be saying. Within the analytical framework, stage 1 of the analytic process corresponds to the sole consideration of the transcribed interviews.

Stage 2 of the analytic process was where story segments and their corresponding story themes were identified from the interview transcripts. The main purpose of the analysis in stage 2 was to examine what participants may be saying in greater detail using narrative inquiry. The main activities were: (1) parsing interview transcripts into story segments, (2) transcribing selected story segments in detail, and (3) noting possible themes emerging from the participant’s stories. Subsequent and repeated reading of the interview transcripts were coupled with listening to the audio recording. This facilitated a more nuanced understanding of the exchanges during the interviews as well as enabled me to check the accuracy of the transcripts. In turn, this aided the process of identifying story segments. Stories were identified in the order in which they were constructed during the interviews, i.e. chronologically, in order to keep the original interview discourse intact. Within the analytical framework, stage 2 corresponds to analysing the transcribed interviews with the methodological lens.

Stage 3 of the analytic process was where selected story segments were analysed using narrative analysis. This is also the stage where the research questions were imposed onto the data. The main purpose of the analysis in stage 3 was to examine the participants’ stories that provided insights to the research questions. The main activities were: (1) combining story segments based on themes, (2) conducting narrative analysis on combined story segments, and (3) noting initial findings. I began narrative analysis on what I thought at this stage was cases (participants) that had stories relevant to the research questions. In so doing, the aim was to glean as many relevant themes from these *rich* cases with which I could use to guide the analysis of subsequent cases. Within the analytical framework, stage 3 corresponds to the application of the research questions onto the selected story segments in the data. This is also the stage wherein possible research findings were developed.

The analytic process also involved revisiting earlier stages constantly. For instance, initial findings were evaluated against the analysis of the story segments and their corresponding themes (stage 3). In turn, the story segments and their corresponding themes were evaluated against the way the participant's overall narrative was parsed and other story themes contained in their narratives (stage 2). This allowed me to check the veracity of the emerging themes, analyses and findings with the transcribed interviews.

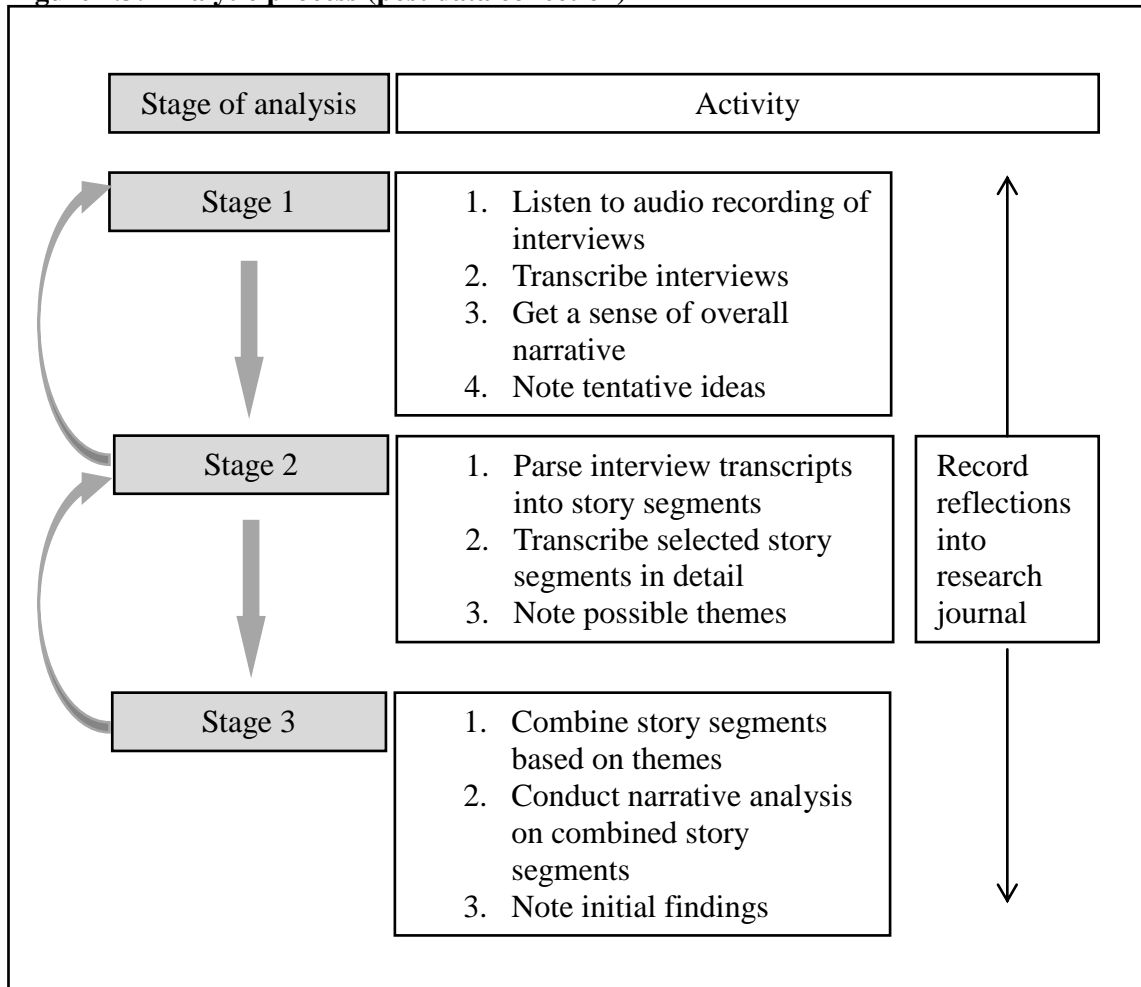
Additionally, I kept an active research journal to record my personal reflections about the analysis and findings. This was an activity that spanned throughout data collection to data analysis through to the writing up phase of the research. Because a narrative researcher inevitably brings his or her narratives into the research, specifically into the analysis, the research journal helped me account for and locate my narrative within the emerging findings (Bazeley, 2013). In this way, I was able to attend to my personal perspectives alongside my participants' narratives.

Though seemingly linear and progressive, activities during one stage of analysis often occurred simultaneously with activities in another stage. For instance, combining stories based on themes (activity 1 in Stage 3) may have been carried out in tandem with noting possible themes (activity 2 in Stage 2). Nonetheless, the analytic process undertaken in this research generally mirrored the linearity and progressivity of the activities from Stages 1 to 3. Figure 4.3 is the graphical representation of the analytic process (post data collection phase) used in this research.

4.6.3 Narrative analysis

This section is a follow-up from the earlier discussions on method, the fourth element of the research process (see Figure 4.1). In section 4.2.4, issues regarding data collection were discussed. In this section, the method of data analysis, that is, how *narrative analysis* was used to analyse the data is discussed instead. Crotty (1998) suggests that decisions about method are determined by methodology. Therefore, the method of data analysis used in this research was aimed at addressing the issue of representation in narrative inquiry, that is, how stories are subjectively constructive, produced in interaction, and reflect process. This section begins with an explanation of the general analytic steps followed by the specific analytic steps undertaken in the analysis.

Figure 4.3: Analytic process (post data collection)



Two general analytic steps were carried out. Firstly, the method of analysis privileged the participants' voice. As much as possible, the participant's stories were kept intact by considering the full account of what they said in their interviews. This also meant that the larger narratives within the participants' stories were considered as opposed to analysing stories separately or in isolation. This first general analytic step help addressed two problems surrounding representation, that is, how stories are subjectively constructive and how stories reflect process.

Keeping the participants' stories intact also meant undertaking two related steps. Firstly, it meant that this research "theoriz[ed] from the case rather than from component themes (categories) across cases" (Riessman, 2008, p.53). Only after analysis has been completed for each participant were the stories analysed across participants. This analytic step assisted the research in analysing stories across cases without losing the individual context from which these stories emerge (Riessman, 2008). However, it was not always possible to

distinguish between theorizing within the case and theorizing across cases since the data was revisited constantly. This is perhaps one of the many instances where reviewing my journal reflections was useful. Secondly, it meant that analysis was focused more on what participants said without excessively imposing existing theoretical ideas or applying the research question onto the data from the onset. This analytic step also assisted the research from analysing stories as merely evidence for existing theories (Riessman, 1993).

The second general analytic step the research undertook was to examine my (the interviewer's) voice alongside the participants'. For example, I included my interview questions, prompts and responses in the analysis when they were relevant to the ensuing story. This second general analytic step specifically addressed the problem of how stories are produced in interaction.

However, the iterative and interpretive process of data analysis complicated matters at times. For instance, I found that the participants' stories could be segmented in several ways, each with different emphases. Where a story began and where it ended can be ambiguous, depending on the researcher's aims (Riessman, 2008). I also found that combining story segment for analysis was not a straightforward task. For instance, stories rarely have clear beginning and/or endings. Sometimes participants may make several points with one story. At other times, they seem to make one point repeatedly with several stories. Perhaps researchers using narrative inquiry have to contend with these – the 'restorying quality of narratives' – and will inevitably apply his or her own interpretive lenses onto the participants' stories. In such instances, I attempted to conduct the analysis in a way that I thought reflected both the participants' overall narrative as well as my research interests.

Apart from the general analytic steps, there are four specific analytic steps undertaken during the narrative analysis. The first specific analytic step undertaken was to focus on the content of the participants' stories, i.e. 'what is said'. The contents of stories were analysed for emerging themes within them, a method Riessman (2008) terms as thematic narrative analysis. Following Riessman (2008), the discovery of themes was guided by prior theory while new theoretical understandings were simultaneously sought from the data. The development of themes during stage 3 of the analytic process was guided by the research questions. As such, in the latter data analysis stage, the data was interpreted in order to build theories along two threads, corresponding to the two main research questions.

The second specific analytic step undertaken was to focus on the structure of the participants' stories, i.e. 'how it is said'. This second step analysed how participants constructed their stories, a method Riessman (2008) describes as structural narrative analysis. Some of the questions posed onto the data during this analytic step included 'why participants developed their stories this way', 'which stories came first', 'how latter stories supported or contradicted earlier stories' and 'what did it mean when latter stories supported or contradicted earlier stories'. Posing such questions also helped the research attend to the sequence and progress of themes within the participants' stories (Squire, 2008).

The third specific analytic step undertaken was to focus on the minute features of the participants' stories. By minute features, I mean to refer to their choice of words, terms, repetitions, pauses and abrupt changes in the direction of conversations. According to Burck (2005), these minute features can reveal insights into what participants may be implicitly trying to convey. Although common to discourse analysts, the scrutiny of minute features of the participants' stories enabled this research to complement the broader analytic focus inherent in narrative analysis.

The fourth specific analytic step undertaken was to focus on contrary cases actively (Squire, 2008). For instance, the analysis focused on what participants *did not* say in addition to what the participants did say. This also meant that interpretations were frequently checked, for instance, asking whether and what it meant when developing themes resonated or not with the participants' overall narratives or why some themes seem to be conspicuously absent in their stories.

Although these general and specific analytic steps overall represented the way the data was analysed, these steps were however moderated against including too much data in the analysis. According to Lieblich et al (1998) and Riessman (2008), narrative researchers usually end up with vast amounts of data, thus risking data overload. As such, the balance I attempted to achieve during the analysis was to include stories so that the analytic themes are sufficiently represented while avoiding including overwhelming amounts of data.

4.6.3.1 Redefining ‘story’

In section 4.3.2, I noted that narrative researchers, among other elements, generally define stories as an event or being event-like (Riessman, 1993; Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). This seems obvious if narrative researchers are investigating topics like miscarriage, illness, divorce and violent acts, examples taken from Riessman’s (2008) text. As I began to analyse the data, I realised that not all of the participants’ stories took the form of events. This became evident once I reflected how spiritual inclinations or spiritual well-being, as opposed to miscarriage, illness, divorce and violent acts were not necessarily constrained to events. For instance, some of the participants’ stories of spiritual inclinations do not have obvious event-like characteristics, such as a beginning, middle and ending, characters, action or a plot. While some participants storied events to illustrate their experiences of work, participants also storied experiential moments outside the boundaries of events.

This raised two significant but related problems for this research. The first problem was that only a small number of interview segments qualified as stories for the analysis if I restricted the definition of stories solely to events. In turn, this would have led to a limited use of the participants’ responses. The second problem was, and perhaps more importantly, there were many non-event stories within the participants’ interview responses that seemed to shed light on their spiritual inclinations while at work. By disregarding these non-event stories, I would have omitted valuable data. Thus, I sought to widen the definition of a story to include non-events in order for this research to maximize the utility of the data.

Patterson (2008) and Squire (2008) argue for approaching interview responses more broadly as experience-centred rather than as event-centred stories. The central argument they make is that narrative researchers ought to investigate the talk surrounding events, not just the events themselves, in order to fully understand their participants’ stories. The talk surrounding events can take on many forms; they may include specific or general experiences (Squire, 2008) or how participants feel about their experiences (Patterson, 2008). This expanded view of what constituted a story seems more compatible with the way this research’s participants storied what work may have meant to them.

While the expanded definition of a story was useful, it posed greater interpretive challenges during the data analysis. For instance, I found it even more difficult to

determine what constituted a story because the additional forms stories took meant that many segments of the transcribed interviews now warranted analysis. Free from the boundaries of events, (experience-centred) stories could now occur in different places throughout and across the first and second interviews. These are some problematic issues that were addressed in section 4.6.3. This shift in the conception of story was nonetheless possible because it did not clash with or required this research to alter its empirical approaches such as its epistemological stance, theoretical perspective or method.

In sum, this research's conceptualisation of what a story is shifted from being purely event-centred to one that accommodates both events and experience. This shift enabled this research to access to a more comprehensive account of the participants' experiences.

4.7 Concluding remarks

This chapter presented the empirical approach taken in the research. Based on the research aims, a qualitative research was selected. Discussions about method, methodology, theoretical perspectives and epistemology (and ontology) are linked one to the other, thus grounding the method with my most basic assumptions about the nature of knowledge. Issues of validity and ethics were addressed and fieldwork issues described. Finally, the rationalization of the process of data analysis was made explicit. Having explained this research's empirical approach, the analysis of the data and the findings that emerged therein are presented in the following two chapters (Chapters 5 and 6).

Chapter 5 Analysis and findings – the interface and the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance

This chapter is the first of two analysis and findings chapters. In this chapter, the analysis focuses on examining the participants' stories of the possible ways the inclination for meaningfulness and the need to meet work targets interface. The analysis may thus shed light on the notion of meaning and how the notion may be experienced in the domain of work, specifically in the light of institutionally prescribed targets and their need to meet them. Apart from that, the analysis of stories of the possible ways participants experience the interface between the inclination for meaningfulness and work targets may also generate insights into how spiritual well-being could be related to work performance. The chapter begins by introducing the reader to the participants.

5.1 Introducing the participants

Participants were given pseudonyms that reflect their actual names. Among the 11 research participants, six of them were acquaintances. They were my colleagues from 2007 to 2010 (see Table 5.1 under heading 'Source of participants'). The other five participants were not known to me prior to the research and were referred to me by ex-colleagues, family and friends who had contact with people in the industry. Six participants belonged to the same team in the same organisation (these six participants' pseudonyms are in bold type font in Table 5.1). Yeoh's participation was the result of snowball sampling. And except for Loh who was self-identified, all other participants were identified by their respective sales managers as satisfying the criteria of consistent sales performance for the research (see Appendix A).

The participants' ages ranged from 29 to 43. There were six female and five male participants. They were from a mix of religious affiliations; Buddhism, Catholicism, Christianity while one participant defined himself as a freethinker. As for the ethnic composition, 10 belonged to the Malaysian Chinese ethnic group while one to the Malaysian Indian ethnic group. In my experience, sales representatives from the Chinese ethnic group make up the majority of healthcare sales representatives in multinational healthcare sales organisations in Malaysia. Hence, the ethnic composition in this cohort of sales representatives within the healthcare sales industry in Malaysia is not exceptional.

Table 5.1: Demographics of participants

No	Name (Pseudonym)	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Religion	Source of participants	
						Acquaintances	Non-acquaintances
1	Alan	M	37	Indian	Catholic	Ex-colleague	
2	Chong	F	29	Chinese	Buddhist	Ex-colleague	
3	Emily	F	31	Chinese	Catholic		Referred by ex-colleague
4	Goh	F	33	Chinese	Catholic	Ex-colleague	
5	Huang	F	43	Chinese	Christian	Ex-colleague	
6	Kenneth	M	40	Chinese	Buddhist		Referred by sister's friend
7	Lim	M	43	Chinese	Freethinker		Referred by a friend
8	Loh	F	33	Chinese	Buddhist	Ex-colleague	
9	Valerie	F	37	Chinese	Buddhist	Ex-colleague	
10	Yeoh	M	31	Chinese	Buddhist		Referred by Kathrin*
11	Yong	M	30	Chinese	Buddhist		Referred by Alan**

* Kathrin was a participant that was interviewed for the research but whose data was not included.

** Alan is research participant number 1 in the table.

There was a diversity of working experiences across the 11 participants. Seven of them had, prior to healthcare sales, worked in other industries. Four participants had spent their entire career in healthcare sales, two of which have worked in a single healthcare sales company throughout their career. Nine of them have worked for at least two healthcare sales companies while one participant has worked in four healthcare sales companies. All participants had spent the majority of their career in healthcare sales and, at the time of interview, were in healthcare sales (see Table 5.2).

There was a wide range of healthcare sales industry experience between the participants, that is, from five to 19 years (although two participants have had experience within the industry other than as a sales representative). While six participants have only worked in a single industry sector, the other five have had experience working in both the pharmaceutical and medical devices industry sectors. All participants had demonstrated consistent sales achievements, i.e. met their sales targets for at least three consecutive years or for at least three out of a span of five years (see Table 5.3).

Table 5.2: Employment history

No	Name (Pseudonym)	Employment history (job)				
		1 st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
1	Alan	Medical	Medical			
2	Chong	Medical insurance underwriter	Pharma	Medical		
3	Emily	Banking	Pharma	Medical	Medical	
4	Goh	Laboratory	Pharma	Medical		
5	Huang	Medical				
6	Kenneth	Pharma	Pharma	Pharma		
7	Lim	Pharma				
8	Loh	Manufacturing sales	Pharma	Pharma	Medical	Pharma
9	Valerie	Telecommunications	Medical			
10	Yeoh	Design (factory)	Pharma			
11	Yong	Training consultancy	Pharma	Medical		

Note: 'Pharma' and 'Medical' is short for pharmaceutical sales and medical devices sales respectively.

Table 5.3: Industry experience and sales target achievements

No	Name (Pseudonym)	Sales representative experience (years)				Total industry experience (years)
		Medical	Pharmaceutical	Industry experience	Sales target achievement	
1	Alan	6	-	6	4	13**
2	Chong	5	2	7	6	7
3	Emily	3	3	6	6	6
4	Goh	7	2	9	8	9
5	Huang	19	-	19	14*	19
6	Kenneth	-	16	16	14	16
7	Lim	-	19	19	11	19
8	Loh	3	5.5	8.5	7	8.5
9	Valerie	6	-	6	4	10**
10	Yeoh	-	5	5	4	5
11	Yong	2	3	5	5	5

**Met sales targets for the past six consecutive years.*

***Total industry experience included positions other than as a sales representative.*

5.2 Participants' stories – initial general impressions

The analysis begins with my initial general impressions of the stories told by the participants in the interviews. These initial general impressions represented the early findings from which later analysis and reanalysis of the data were built on. The initial general impressions were collated from eight participants at the first instance before a structure (see tabled form of initial general impressions in subsequent chapter sections) for

noting them down was later developed. This structure was updated alongside the analyses of the remaining three participants and subsequent reanalyses of all eleven participants.

The initial general impressions were made in correspondence to the two main research questions, namely (1) what is the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance?, and (2) how does the inclination for meaningfulness and the need to meet work targets interface? The starting analytical task was to infer from their stories how meaningful work might have been for them and how such meaningfulness of work may have interfaced with work targets. In so doing, I may be able to better understand their spiritual inclinations at work and subsequently infer how spiritual well-being and work performance were possibly related.

From the initial general impressions, there were three possible ways the participants' inclination for meaningfulness interfaced with the need to meet work targets (hereafter also referred to as 'the interface'). These three types of interfaces are termed as 'Compatible', 'Incompatible', and 'Absent' (the interface was considered to be 'Absent' when the inclination of meaningfulness were seemingly unapparent from the participants' stories). Table 5.4 lists these three types of interfaces.

Table 5.4: Types of interfaces

No	The interface between the inclination for meaningfulness and the need to meet work targets
1	Compatible
2	Incompatible
3	Absent

Some of the participants' stories seem to depict only one type of interface while some other participants' stories seem to depict several types of interfaces within one job. In most of the participants' stories, a change in the type of interface can generally be observed when participants move to another job.

In sections 5.3 to 5.5, the analyses of the participants' stories are presented. The presentation of the analyses includes reproducing selected segments of interviews for the reader. To help ensure anonymity and confidentiality, some terms and names are anonymised. The excerpted interviews include abrupt cessation of talk, clear discernible

pauses and translations of local (Malaysian ethnic groups) dialects to the English language. However, the excerpted interviews contain two omissions. The first omission is the majority of my back-channel utterances, e.g. ‘mmm’, ‘uh-huh’, ‘mhm’ and ‘okay’, particularly when they are not critical to the storytelling. These omissions make the excerpts more readable considering the large amount of texts I display for the reader. The second omission is the asides or detours participants make in a stretch of storytelling that are not central to the focus of the analysis. However, I am aware of the interpretive work narrative researchers apply in determining what may or may not be central to the stories participants tell as well as of the possibility asides and detours may have in determining the possible meanings embedded in stories. Thus, the second omission is made sparingly. A guide to the transcription symbols used can be found in Appendix F.

5.3. Compatible Interface

In this section, I present the participants’ stories that seemed to depict how the inclination for meaningfulness can be compatible with the need to meet work targets. These stories seem to show how the interface can be compatible in different ways and to varying degrees. The analyses of these stories also demonstrate the different ways spiritual well-being may be related to work performance. The stories that depict compatible interfaces can be grouped into three clusters, corresponding to the *type of interface* and the *relation of spiritual well-being to work performance*. They are: (1) Compatible and Positive, (2) Compatible and Insignificant, and (3) Compatible (inclination for meaningfulness eclipsed) and Insignificant.

5.3.1 Compatible, Positive

From my initial general impressions, I noticed how Chong, Loh, Yong, and Emily had stories that shared similarities. Some of their stories had depicted the interface as compatible and the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance as positive (See Table 5.5)

Table 5.5: Initial general impressions – Chong, Loh, Yong, and Emily.

Research participant	The interface between the inclination for meaningfulness and work targets	The relation between spiritual well-being and work performance
Chong (stories of her second healthcare sales job)	Chong storied her job as significantly helping to improve patients' lives. Stories depict how promoting her devices successfully in order to register sales also meant helping to improve the patients' post-surgical prognosis and recovery.	Told several stories that explicitly linked 'making a difference' with sales achievements. The link between 'improving patients' lives' and 'making a sale' was closely storied.
Loh (stories of her second healthcare sales job)	Loh storied how she was able to contribute to patients' wellbeing with the disease management workshops she conducted, which ultimately helped place her in a favourable position to win the clients' business.	The patient workshops Loh conducted complemented the business needs of her dialysis centres (clients). As a result of the patient workshops, her clients tended to use her drugs instead of her competitor's.
Yong (stories of his second healthcare sales job)	Though only a limited aspect of his job, Yong storied his job as 'making a difference' because it entailed helping financially poor patients who needed his surgical devices secure social welfare funds for their surgeries.	'Helping patients apply for funds' contributed directly to his sales achievements. Though this had only a small impact on his overall sales performance, it seemed to have been particularly important part of what he wanted to story about his job.
Emily (stories of her third healthcare sales job)	Emily storied the job as giving her the opportunity to add value to her doctors and their patients. In return, this was also usually accompanied by the doctors using her devices. She also gained satisfaction from contributing to the success of a case/surgery.	Emily's assistance during her doctor's cases partly contributed to the increased use of her devices.

In the following section, I examine Chong's narrative in detail since her narrative seemed to sufficiently illustrate how the inclination for meaningfulness and work targets could be compatible. Chong's narrative also possibly illustrates how spiritual well-being and sales achievements could have been positively related.

The analyses of Chong's stories in the following subsection, as well as the detailed analyses of selected participants' narratives in later subsections, will constitute three main sections. In the first section, I will provide a sketch of the participants' background relevant to the analysis. The second section focuses on presenting selected segments of stories that represent the possible ways the inclination for meaningfulness could have interfaced with work targets. Some contexts for the ensuing stories may be provided in order to help readers situate the stories. The third section focuses on the analysis of the individual stories (each excerpt) and the overall narrative (all excerpts) presented in the

second section. These three sections will be given the respective subheadings: Introduction, Narrative and Analysis.

5.3.1.1. Chong

Introduction

Chong is a 29 year-old lady with eight years of working experience. Aside from a nine month stint as a medical insurance underwriter, also her first job, Chong has worked in two multinational healthcare sales companies where she has met her sales targets for six out of seven years. At the time of the interview, she was in her fifth year in the second healthcare sales company selling medical devices and servicing the hospital market sector. The following analysis is centred on her then current job and her work promoting devices for minimally-invasive surgical procedures²⁵.

During the interviews, Chong told stories of how she derived deep satisfaction from the job including satisfaction from overcoming challenges at work, from the many growth opportunities the job provided and from being recognised as a sales achiever. Some of these stories relate solely to her task of pursuing sales such as when she won a large hospital tender for her products. Other stories, however, relate to her inclinations to want to make a difference in her job, a strong reason Chong cited for moving from her earlier jobs and staying at the current one.

Narrative

Early in the first interview, Chong had noted that she valued the opportunity to help patients in her current job since she promoted products that benefitted patients. She had earlier also revealed that though she did not get to study medicine, she had always wanted a job that brought her as close as possible to healthcare because she wanted to make a difference. I was attempting to get Chong to expand on these thoughts by asking her whether she thought about the job differently during the year her sales achievements were below expectations. Chong responded by saying that she still felt her job was meaningful and doubted whether she would find another job that was as fulfilling as the current one.

²⁵ Minimally-invasive surgeries are performed by making small skin incisions using specialist equipment such as fibre optics, miniature cameras and surgical apparatus that can be inserted into small body incisions. This type of surgery is considered more advanced than conventional surgical techniques where surgical incisions tend to be larger and recovery slower.

She then related her experience of a recent routine sales call she made to one of her surgeons.

Excerpt 1

“I was in a surgery trying to promote (Device S) to the surgeon, surgeon wasn’t using my product. He has open, opened up the patient, he thought that he’s just going to do a gastrectomy, remove a stomach, but, mmm, it turns out to be the situation has turn bad. Patients will not be able to survive. Even though he do surgery also pointless. So surgeon just do a bit of bypass, just for palliative purpose, close back. And surgeon was so much stress because he said, he didn’t know the stage of the disease go so fast, so now he has to face patient and tell the patient that, [Right] you know. So, we change, after surgery finish, we change and go out. So when I see the surgeon, he was very distant. Mmm, when I came out from the OT, I saw him wearing just, still OT clothes but talking to the patient’s [Family] family. Patient’s family was crying and all that and that makes me feel like, oh my god, my job is important, you know, it is affecting not just the patients, patients’ family because everyone have people that are surrounding them, their loved one. So, me being in the healthcare helps peoples with mmm just help people, and and their loved ones, those that affect them. I was thinking if I don’t have (Device S) for him, probably he would not be able to do the bypass and all that, I feel like I’m also part of the, the the surgery, you know, like I, because of the products I carry and all that.”

During the second interview, I attempted to probe more about this aspect of Chong’s experiences of work. Hence, I had asked Chong to describe situations when she was able to experience moments that her work helped patients. She responded by telling a succession of stories. I select three segments within this succession of storytelling since they seem to elaborate the significance of her job in helping patients. Specifically, excerpts 2 and 3 are Chong’s accounts of events that had taken place while excerpt 4 is a segment where she related what those events meant to her.

Excerpt 2

“Recently, I’ve been to, mmm, gynae’s, mmm, cases. Just introducing (Product H) to them. They have never used it before, for cancer patients. I think the benefit’s definitely there. Surgeons are reluctant to use it. Very reluctant to use it. Force. Actually I have to force them to use because I truly believe there’s a benefit. A few force and eventually they use it, and they likes it, saves times, and, mmm, I always follow up after that, after the cases. I will just text them and ask them how it goes. And when they tell me patients doing very well and less pain and all that kind of thing, it gives me that more drive and motivations to sell that same thing to another surgeons. Because first thing is helps the patients, the second thing is what’s the better sell, selling point than others surgeon also seen the benefit and says that it helps patients to another surgeon. So, I think that is the things.”

Excerpt 3

“When I attend one of the surgeon's case, he doesn't know how to use my product and he cause some bleeding (... clarification of which surgeon she was referring to...) So, it's bleeding. He started using (conventional device to stop the bleeding). After that I follow up with this surgeon. He said, he sort of blame us because your product failed, he has to use this other thing that caused (excessive tissue damage) to the patients. He, he, he didn't really blame but I can read between the fine line but he is also sort of blame himself because why he use the other instruments, cause (excessive tissue damage). I was in the case, you know. I, I felt so bad for the patient like (tsk), I feel like maybe I have not managed this surgeon well enough on teaching him how to use my product, otherwise this thing wouldn't have happened. I felt so bad. And it caused (excessive tissue damage). And I, I tell myself over and over and over again I must remind, I must replicate this story to another people except I take out the surgeons name, I musn't tell them what it is but I must tell them what I've experience, what I've seen before. Using other conventional technique, not my product, cause (excessive tissue damage). And I even seen the sur- patients in O.T. getting the (surgical repair for the excessive tissue damage). It was not easy, it was (^tsk^) unnecessary, you know.”

After the story in excerpt 3, Chong described another event where she was assisting yet another surgeon in surgery who was using her product for the first time. This surgeon encountered ‘bleeding’ during surgery similar to one the surgeon in excerpt 3 experienced while using her product. This time, however, she was more prepared to help the surgeon manage the bleeding. In the end, the surgeon did not revert to the conventional device and as a result, post-operative complications were seemingly avoided. After surgery, Chong took the opportunity to relate the lesson that the surgeon in excerpt 3 learnt to the current surgeon she was referring to, which was to avoid reverting to the conventional device. She concluded this segment of the storytelling in this way:

Excerpt 4

“So that part, I feel like I'm also saving a lot of patients from going through, you know, the traumatic experience that the first patient did. So that being, be able to be in a case, teach the surgeon to use our instruments, correctly guiding them through what other surgeons have done correctly, and mmm, following up with them on how the patient doing is actually bring me closer to the patients also. Like in a way, at the moment of time, you just feel like, I feel like when I'm doing my work, I just, I just thought like, I have to think like the surgeon. It's all about the patients now, mmm, it's all about getting the surgery done completely. However when you reflect it back, how you link it back eventually, you know you're helping the patients.”

Analysis

The narrative interview method seems particularly suited for Chong. In most instances, she launched into elaborate storytelling with very little prompting, as made obvious in the above excerpts; other than my initial question, I did not direct the telling in any significant

way except to encourage storytelling by interrupting as little as possible. Chong recounted these events and experiences seemingly without much hesitation.

It was also interesting to see the variation in the type of stories Chong used to convey her experiences. For instance, Chong used a mix of generalised accounts of events of work, as in excerpt 2, and specific events at work, as in excerpt 3. It seemed possible then that excerpt 2 was meant to be a synopsis of the ways her work helped patients while excerpt 3 substantiated her claims further. Only after Chong related four events (of which two, that is, excerpts 2 and 3, are shown here) did she explained (in excerpt 4) what she wanted to convey through these stories. All in all, these seem to point to the veracity, significance and magnitude of these moments as part of her working experiences.

In excerpt 1, Chong depicted how a seemingly routine sales call led to an eye-opening experience of the gravity of her job. Chong storied that she, via the products she promoted, had the potential to positively impact patients' lives as well as those of the patients' families. What may seem like a routine sales call, she perhaps realised, was not so routine after all. Her sales calls enabled her to be 'part of the surgery' and more consequentially, made her partly responsible for the surgical outcome of patients. Therein lay her influence and the possibility for her to make a difference to her patients' lives.

The way the story in excerpt 1 came about helps explain Chong's story further. She told the story in response to my question of whether the meaningfulness she felt of her job, i.e. being able to make a difference to patients' lives, was diluted when she did not achieve her sales targets. In effect, the story in excerpt 1 was not about making a sale although Chong was in surgery to promote her product. There is perhaps very little that a healthcare sales representative does that is not related to sales. Instead, Chong made it to be about the fundamental activity she engaged in at work on a regular basis – her sales calls. Thus, the message Chong conveyed with this story perhaps is her realisation that the fundamental things she did at work 'helped patients', putting aside temporarily the demands of sales expectations.

This is not to say that achieving her sales targets was unimportant. In excerpts 2 and 3, Chong storied how helping patients and sales achievements were identical pursuits. The seemingly obvious and straightforward storytelling in excerpt 2 indicated her equally obvious and straightforward message: getting her surgeons to use her products literally

meant helping patients (because of the product's proven benefits for the group of gynaecology-related cancer patients). This, in turn, helped her persuade more surgeons to use her devices and register sales, a situation that resembles a virtuous cycle. And if excerpt 2 is indeed a synopsis of Chong's experiences at work, then she was perhaps trying to convey how these reflect her general experience of work.

The story Chong told in excerpt 3 seems to convey a similar point albeit from a different perspective, which is that her incompetence can be detrimental to patients' wellbeing. Chong's incompetence can be identified as her inability to prepare her surgeons adequately to use her device during surgery, which is another way of saying she did not promote her device well. Although the outcome of the incident in excerpt 3 also meant a loss of future sales to a potential client, Chong did not highlight it. Instead, the emphasis of the story was on her feelings and her regret that her incompetence led to the patient's (poor) surgical outcome. Excerpt 3 also possibly depicts Chong's desire to want to improve patient outcomes, evident by the way the story was about her assuming responsibility proactively in ensuring negative patient surgical outcomes in the cases she assists are avoided.

In order to prevent a repeat of such negative outcomes, Chong apparently sought to motivate herself to guide surgeons better on the use of her device in future. In a following segment (not depicted here), she used the lesson she learnt from the case to convince other surgeons of the dangers of post-operative complications caused by conventional devices and instead to stick to her (more technologically advanced) device. In essence and based on the story in excerpt 3, helping patients for Chong meant promoting her products well. The more competent she was in promoting her devices, the more she improved her patients' chances of a better surgical outcome.

Excerpt 4 is the culmination of this extended stretch of storytelling where Chong expressed in explicit terms what the preceding talk meant. Chong interpreted her experiences of work as making a difference to patients' lives. To her, doing her job well, i.e. attending her surgeons' cases, teaching surgeons how to use her products correctly and convincing surgeons to use more advanced devices (hers in particular), brought her "closer to the patients also" (see excerpt 4). It is therefore not coincidental that the location of all Chong's stories is the operation theatre – the place where she can have significant effect on both her sales and her patients. The word "also" (see quote above from excerpt 4) underscores an important point Chong made earlier in her storytelling (see excerpt 2), that

is, achieving sales *also* meant helping patients. Thus, it is very likely that the meaning Chong derived from her work significantly motivated her to promote her products and to promote them well.

All in all, the stories contained in these excerpts seem to show that Chong experiences her job to be meaningful because she can make a difference and that these are generally congruent with her daily tasks and her responsibility to deliver sales. In a way, the job allows her actions to be congruent with her values and beliefs about what she wanted her job to be.

After signalling the end of the first interview, Chong voluntarily offered her reflections about the interview, specifically ones about her intuitions of her life beyond work, of fate and destiny (see excerpt 5).

Excerpt 5

“I feel like I can already see how my life is going to turn out. I’ll live a good life, I’ll be happy. My objective in life is always to be just live a good life and be happy, and make sure the people surround you are happy and you’re trying to have ripple effect on other peoples, care to other peoples and all. I really feel like I know where my life is going to end. It’s going to be okay, I’m not so worried. I will still stress about work and all that but I, I’m quite, I am quite, mmm, secured and, and calm knowing that my life is going to be okay. But how do I know that? So I feel like there was something else that’s telling me that it’s going to be okay. Probably a guardian angel or something. (...talks about dreams and the subconscious mind...). I also think it’s like, mmm, someone trying to nudge you and tell you something, mmm, be it like a higher power or your own subconscious and all that.”

I include this segment of the interview because it seems to demonstrate Chong’s sense of a divine-like presence or to something larger than herself, an obvious reference to the notion of connection. It also possibly shows how notions of meaning, values and authenticity in Chong’s experience of life are brought to bear on her experience of work, or vice versa. As such, it can thus be additionally inferred that Chong aspired to integrate the work and non-work domains of her life.

The selection of Chong’s stories excerpted above seems to illustrate how the inclination for meaningfulness and the need to meet work targets can be compatible. They also seem to indicate how spiritual well-being may be positively related with work performance.

5.3.2 Compatible, Insignificant

Goh's and Huang's stories initially came across as very similar to other participants' stories that depicted a compatible interface and the anticipated positive relation between spiritual well-being and work performance. Upon closer scrutiny however, their stories seem to more accurately portray an insignificant rather than a positive relation between spiritual well-being and work performance (see Table 5.6).

Table 5.6: Initial general impressions – Goh and Huang

Research participant	The interface between the inclination for meaningfulness and work targets	The relation between spiritual well-being and work performance
Goh (stories of her second healthcare sales job)	Goh viewed the products she sold as helping to improve patients' lives because products are healthcare-related; she contrasted healthcare sales with automobile sales where automobile sales do not 'improve lives'. Her job is meaningful in this respect.	Stories show how she explicitly <i>did not</i> connect 'making an impact on patients' with her sales achievements. Instead, being able to make an impact was more a prerequisite for pursuing and staying in the job, not a motivator for sales achievements.
Huang (stories of her one and only healthcare sales job)	To Huang, effectively assisting surgeons with her devices in surgery was the meaningful part of her work since it had a significant impact on patients. It was also a way for her to contribute to 'God's good work'. She described how a significant portion of whether she achieved her sales targets was due to providence.	Stories depicted contributing to 'God's good work' and sales achievements as separate aspects of work. Huang sought to divide her work equally between pursuing meaningful work as well as pursuing sales.

The following is an analysis of Goh's experiences because her stories depicting the possible insignificant relation between spiritual well-being and work performance amidst a compatible interface, compared to Huang's, were more fully developed.

5.3.2.1 Goh

Introduction

Goh is a 33 year-old lady with a total of nine years of experience in healthcare sales, with two years in the pharmaceutical sector (her second job) and the rest in the medical devices sector (her third job) where she was at the time of the interview. In her nine years, Goh has

met her yearly sales targets eight times. In her seven years in the medical devices sector, Goh promoted medical devices that supported minimally-invasive surgical procedures, covering the private and government hospital market sectors.

Goh revealed in the interviews that she took great pride in being a sales achiever, which provided her with an identity she wanted to be known by within the domain of work. In addition to being a sales achiever, Goh explicitly mentioned that she sought deeper satisfaction from the job beyond her sales achievements, a reason she cites for leaving the pharmaceutical sales job after two years, and which she found in her then current medical devices sales job. Thus, the following analysis focuses on a selection of Goh's stories about her third job.

I present four excerpts from my interview with Goh. Excerpts 1 and 2 belonged to one segment of talk while excerpts 3 and 4 belonged to a subsequent segment of talk. These four excerpts shed light on Goh's narrative regarding what work might mean to her and how she related that meaning of work with the task of selling.

Narrative

Early in the first interview, I had asked Goh what she enjoyed most about her work. After a brief and seemingly halting response about team camaraderie and the interesting variety of products she carried, she spoke at length about the values she associated to the 'healthcare' part of her job:

Excerpt 1

"Mmm, (^tsk^) and I think sounds very like mmm, like very (mentions company values²⁶) but I think at the end of the day, I personally feel that although I'm a sales person, you know, always say like sales, car salesperson, you know all so (tsk), doesn't sound that good, right? But among, imagine among all the sales job that we have and we're in healthcare, and I think our products mmm, mmm we we, you can feel they're a bit difference you know, by you're providing this product, the doctor can do this and it actually benefit the patient, although you are very far far away from the patient, but in a way, you are doing something good. So I think that is at the end, besides your incentive, beside your recognition, that is something (tsk), interesting about it. Give you something like, okay, I'm still doing something. Small, small part, but I'm still doing something, rather than I'm just selling a car. I don't think I will have that kind of, mmm satisfaction or is it satisfaction? Something, something to push you, something inner.

²⁶ Her company's values emphasise patients' wellbeing over profits.

Without any prompting, Goh proceeded to illustrate the point she was trying to make in the first excerpt with a story (see excerpt 2):

Excerpt 2

“Because mmm, example my mother-in-law, she had a hysterectomy. She did (minimally-invasive procedure). And I have an aunty who did (conventional procedure) years ago. So when my aunty visited my mother-in-law, she was so impressed the next day she could already sit up. So you know, although you know you didn’t, you know, created (minimally-invasive procedures), but you know that by every time you’re asking the surgeon to to embark on new procedures, there’s actually a difference in the patient’s recovery. So I think, at the end of the day, you feel good (^tsk^) you know, this is what (minimally-invasive procedure) is about, something nice when you see patients up and running. [I: So that's what you -] I think that is the, the last thing why I enjoy my job besides all the people, the, the challenge, the products, you have one more extra.”

Midway through the first interview, I was attempting to steer the conversation back to the moments she deemed satisfying about her job. But instead of asking another open-ended question to prompt more storytelling, I posed a question that prematurely assumed there was conflict between being engaged in work that benefitted patients and getting sales (see excerpt 3).

Excerpt 3

“[I’m keen to know more. You mentioned just now about, mmm, when you talk about work that was satisfying to you] Mmm [mmm, that you see patients recovering. Mmm, so, as sales people, our core function is to meet the sales target.] Yup. [So, do, do you find, mmm, difficulty trying to, to do work that is meaningful to you, like for example, seeing your patients recover from] Mmm [a (minimally-invasive) surgery and meeting your sales figures?] Is it difficult to balance that [Yeah] two thoughts together? (.) Mmm, not too difficult I guess. [Why, why do you say that?] Because I know my main objective is to hit my sales target. That is my first job criteria, which I need to meet. The only thing, I’m saying that, why I feel all these seeing patients recover because it gives me something that what I do is different from a typical salesperson. I’m pushing for this but at the end of the day I know someone is benefitting from it. So, I think, mmm, I don’t think there’s any clashes.”

The interview went on for another minute before Goh, shifted away from the current conversation, returned to my earlier line of questioning (beginning of excerpt 3) in a seeming attempt to address the presumed conflict I implied between work that benefitted patients and getting sales (see excerpt 4, which begins with the conversation just before the noted shift in the conversation):

Excerpt 4

“[What’s the foremost thing you think about when you’re doing sales work?] The first thing I think about [Yeah] I think about hitting my sales target [Okay] and, and how I need to hit my sales target. [Okay] So but yeah, so it’s really, really, very work objective-driven, mmm. [Mmm] But the thing that I said why I can last so long, although it’s so much work, so stressful and all, because it’s not just a typical sales job. Because at the end of the day, you know that all you’re doing, of course you have your own achievement, your own recognition that give you a good life or whatever but, at the end, there is someone benefitting from it, that give you an extra good feeling I guess, that you’re doing something right, you’re not just, mmm, pushing sales for the sake of pushing. So that is something that, so called comforting you, that you’re doing something with a bit of, mmm, difference in someone’s life. Cause if you’re just a salesperson, if you just look yourself as a salesperson getting your m- sales target, it can be quite mundane after a while, like what, what is in life, you know. I think you have to do a bit of this.”

Analysis

Out of these four segments, only the segment of talk in excerpt 2 referenced an event. The other three excerpts (excerpts 1, 3 and 4) are stories of her experiences. This seems to generally reflect the way Goh preferred to relate to her experiences of work. Goh also took charge of the storytelling, as much as I did as an interviewer, as evidenced in the way she steered the conversation back to what she wanted to say (see excerpt 4). Excerpts 1 and 2 seem to reveal some insights about Goh’s inclination for meaningfulness at work while excerpts 3 and 4 sheds light on the interface and the relation between spiritual well-being and sales achievements.

In excerpt 1, Goh indicated she needed “something inner” to “push” her in her job beyond, what might be considered to be the more extrinsic rewards of work, such as “incentives” and “recognition”. She was referring to “doing something good”, an intrinsic satisfaction she seemingly got from being associated with healthcare. These were indications that altruism and ideas of meaning and purpose was storied to have been somewhat pivotal to what the job meant to her. Goh’s impressions of how her work impacted patients was characterised by her mother-in-law’s surgery, since she storied it to illustrate her point. Short of experiencing it herself, having a family member benefitting from minimally-invasive surgery would have likely affirmed and appealed to her sense of contribution as well as pride and self-worth, with respect to her job.

But the segments of talk in excerpts 1 and 2 seem to indicate that being able to do something good in her job is not something she pursued directly. Instead, it is something that will ultimately happen, an “extra” (excerpt 2) element of satisfaction from the job,

simply because of the healthcare aspect of her job. Relatedly, Goh saw her role in helping patients to be small, qualifying midway in excerpts 1 and 2, that she is “very far far away from the patient” (excerpt 1) and that she did not create minimally-invasive procedures respectively. These come across as her attempts to offer a more realistic picture of the good she was able to do in her job. Nonetheless, being able to contribute in the minimal way she perceived she did was perhaps still meaningful to Goh, at least more meaningful than selling cars.

Excerpts 3 and 4 depict segments of the interview where Goh related, or more precisely, did not relate her inclination for meaningfulness with her sales achievements. The beginning part of excerpt 3 shows my ineptness at probing the issue. Fortunately, my ineptness also prompted a response that helped me understand Goh’s experience further. Though I challenged her response on several accounts (in the initial question and later when I asked “why did you say that?”), Goh’s response was resolute – she perceived no conflict between engaging in work that benefitted patients and getting sales. This is because she viewed meeting sales targets as an *unquestionable* work goal while being able to ‘make a difference’ as an *additional* satisfaction that she got from the job. Thus, she did not see any conflict of interest because ‘making a difference’ had nothing to do with her motivations to pursue her sales targets. In this way, the meaning she derived from her (then) current job seemed to have been a prerequisite for choosing or staying in a job and had very little relation to her motivations to pursue sales.

Nonetheless, it still seemed important to Goh that her work contributed to patients in the way that it did. An overarching theme in her stories, evident from the repeated use of the terms “at the end of the day” and “at the end” throughout these four excerpts when she referred to ‘making a difference’, was possibly that her job was *eventually* a worthy one. In a sense, pursuing sales would have been acceptable, perhaps even viewed as worthwhile, since it *ultimately* helped patients.

Thus, the selection of stories above may be indicating that despite a seeming compatible interface, the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance can be insignificant.

5.3.3 Compatible (inclination for meaningfulness eclipsed), Insignificant

Some of the participants' stories seemed to demonstrate another way the interface can be compatible. However, the possible inclinations for meaningfulness from their stories were likely to have been eclipsed by the need to meet work targets. See Table 5.7 for my initial general impression of Valerie's, Kenneth's and Loh's stories.

Table 5.7: Initial general impressions – Valerie, Kenneth and Loh.

Research participant	The interface between the inclination for meaningfulness and work targets	The relation between spiritual well-being and work performance
Valerie (stories of her one and only healthcare sales job)	Valerie's stories of work generally emphasised meeting her sales targets. Contradictorily, she also storied how the excessive emphasis on sales overshadowed the more meaningful aspects of work.	Potential inclination for meaningfulness seemed crowded out by the need to meet her sales targets. Spiritual well-being probably has very little relation to her motivation to pursue sales and to her sales achievements.
Kenneth (stories of his third healthcare sales job)	Kenneth's stories of work were predominantly about meeting his sales targets. His stories also seem to imply that he recognised a certain absence of deeper motivation and satisfaction in his work. Stories of spiritual motivations to work were only rarely and haltingly storied.	Stories portrayed his exceeding emphasis on sales and sales achievements despite some indication of a need for motivation for work that is deeper than what he seems to be currently experiencing.
Loh (stories of her third healthcare sales job)	Loh's storied how, though there was potential to, she was not able to add value to her patients in any significant way. Described the pressure of the job to mostly sell rather than to service or work closely with the doctor on their cases.	There was very little space to engage with activities that might have been experienced as 'making a difference'. But Loh met her sales targets for two out of three years in this job. As such, it seems unlikely that spiritual well-being had any significant influence on her sales target achievements.

Loh's stories about a possible compatible but eclipsed interface represented her experiences in one of her four jobs while Valerie's and Kenneth's stories that depict a similar narrative seemed to encompass a large part of their experiences of work. As such, Loh's stories regarding the compatible but eclipsed interface will be examined alongside her other possible experiences of the interface in section 5.5.2. Between Valerie's and Kenneth's stories, the way the inclination for meaningfulness was eclipsed by work targets seemed better depicted in Valerie's. I thus present Valerie's stories for analysis in this subsection.

5.3.3.1 Valerie

Introduction

Valerie is a 37 year-old lady with 11 years of working experience. At the time of the interview, she had spent her latter 10 years in a single multinational medical devices sales company where she worked as a sales representative from 2003 to 2008, and again from 2013 to 2014. Between 2009 and 2012, Valerie spent two years as a sales manager and another two years as a personal assistant. In her first six years in healthcare sales, she met her sales targets for four consecutive years. My interview and the subsequent analysis are focused on her experiences as a sales representative.

Valerie mentioned during the interview that she had been recently reflecting on her job, particularly her motivations for pursuing sales. This seemed to have been prompted by substantial restructuring within the company and her time away from sales work (when she worked as a personal assistant). She also said that there was a contrast in her experience of work as a sales representative between her prior years and currently. For the most part, Valerie serviced the hospital market sector. Her job included promoting her medical devices to her surgeons, assisting them during surgery and on occasions, when requested by her surgeons, arranged direct purchase of the devices for patients.

Narrative

The following are four excerpts from Valerie's interview. They are presented in the order which they took place so that the reader may get a sense of the contrasting meanings Valerie's storied about her work. Excerpts 1 to 3 are taken from a segment of talk that took place early in the first interview, where I was exploring what her experiences of work may be like.

Excerpt 1

"[You have a favourite product?] Mmm, (.) [No?] I won't say a favourite product, but of course there are certain items which we would tend to focus more depending on the hospital, on the opportunity. Yeah, I don't have a specific thing (...Valerie spoke about learning new surgical techniques associated with new medical devices...) so, actually if you were to say a product, a procedure that I like particularly, probably (treatment of Disease A) surgery, if I had, if I was forced to choose because, mmm, in terms of returns, yeah. [Ah, okay]. If you were to put it that way, then yeah."

Excerpt 2

“[I: What do you like doing most about your job?] I (.) about my job I’d say it keeps me busy, it keeps me thinking, it keeps me moving and, mmm, being able to make a difference number one, mmm (.). It’s very cliché to say we’re making a difference in patient’s lives, but yeah we do, but I would say the satisfaction comes from gaining the respect from my customers i.e. the surgeons when you’re able to (.) to really, you know, mmm, be on the same level with them, you know when you’re basically, I would translate that to respect. And yeah, knowing that, that you’re there and that you are, there’s, there’s some value that you’re carrying, some value. Mmm. [I: So the value to the surgeons.] Value to the surgeons in terms of mmm, using the product, which yeah in my mind is superior. So of course that would enable him to perform the surgery in a better way i.e. faster, safer with better outcomes. And of course, I mean, all that also is in order to achieve my sales targets, which of course is a different side of the coin, which is personal satisfaction.”

Excerpt 3

“[I: What do you not like about healthcare sales?] (.) (^Laughs^) What do I not like about healthcare sales? At the end of the day, it’s a sales job. There are times when you are, when you’re (^laughs^) pushed to sell for the sake of selling. Yeah to (.) to me, to be there to service the account, mmm, that itself brings a certain level of satisfaction. But when you go beyond that and you’re doing it just to achieve the sales number, yeah so, sometimes you get that. (*Doesn’t feel nice*) (^laughs^) but then again, you got to do what you got to do.”

Valerie had indicated in excerpts 1 and 2 that what she did was ultimately in the interest of achieving her sales targets. Yet, she seemed to also indicate (in excerpt 3) deprecation for pursuing sales during certain moments. I was still asking interview questions to further explore Valerie’s experiences at the latter part of the first interview when the conversation took an interesting turn. It began with my question of whether she had any direct interaction with patients. Valerie was in the midst of recounting in a general way moments when she sold her devices directly to patients when her storytelling was interrupted by an incoming call on her mobile. Excerpt 4 begins from the segment of talk just before the call disruption.

Excerpt 4

“But it’s also at times like that when you actually see your instruments being used, which is also another aspect of, mmm, knowing that your items make a difference.

(...Valerie answers an incoming call on her mobile. Instead of picking up from where the conversation left off after the call, Valerie asks me if what we were talking about just before the phone call were related to the spiritual side. I told her I do not know and do not want to prematurely assume so. I further explained that all I am interested in at this point are her work experiences and her stories about them. I then reminded her where the conversation left off...)

[You mentioned that items also make a difference. Mmm, I actually don’t really

know clearly how your items make a difference.] Oh, what I mean is that, you know, when you just focused on sales, when we're just selling, selling, selling, you don't really think about how it's used and how it makes a difference in patient's lives. But then, when you actually see the patient and you, they will ask, they will ask me what's this used for? And I actually explain. I'll spend some time with them and explain like a (medical device A) this is to insert the instrument, 'cause I have to give them, they will ask what is this? So, I actually explain to them, mmm, how the items are going to be used. So, and then you know, this is the patient itself, like the patient is right there, and, and, it, it's like a jigsaw, you can put it together like, hey patient is actually going to use this rather than hospital, sell, sell and, yeah."

Analysis

Stories that relate to Valerie's inclination for meaningfulness at work tended to either be summarised or only briefly told. Additionally, she seemed generally cautious with her responses and unwilling to be precise about what happened. It is thus possible that Valerie's interview responses were guarded, at least perceptibly more than the other participants in the research. She was also probably at crossroads in her career, having just returned to a sales representative role after a four-year hiatus.

Valerie's stories seemed to depict some contrasting views she had had about her job. A substantial focus of her stories seemed to be about her sales achievements. Excerpt 1 and (the latter portion of) excerpt 2 are only two of several moments in the first and second interviews where Valerie depicted getting sales as her ultimate focus at work. Although gaining "respect" (excerpt 2) from her surgeons and bringing "some value" (excerpt 2) to their practice gave her some measure of satisfaction, these too were seemingly only part of a larger goal to help her achieve her sales targets. Thus, these segments give the impression that everything she did at work served the primary interest of getting sales, which she expressed as the source of her "personal satisfaction" (excerpt 2) from work.

Paradoxically, Valerie's source of satisfaction from work seemed to have also been her source of dissatisfaction about work (see excerpt 3). She also seemed to have been uneasy revealing this to me, made obvious by her somewhat nervous laughter that occurred throughout this segment of talk. This was perhaps also accentuated by the fact that we were acquaintances and peers in healthcare sales at that. However, it was not pursuing sales per se she took issue with. It was when she was compelled to overextend herself in order to pursue sales. In a segment of talk (not depicted here) that took place immediately after the segment in excerpt 3, Valerie elaborated on what she meant by saying how she recently had to coax clients to bring forward their purchase order just so she could meet her

quarterly sales targets. Pursuing sales this way was less satisfying for Valerie than providing her services to her clients.

But what perhaps provided Valerie hope of a different kind of satisfaction was in realising that there was a more profound meaning to be had from what she did. Valerie's story in excerpt 4 seemed to convey the idea that making a difference to patients provided significantly more meaning to her work compared to merely pursuing sales for the sake of meeting her sales targets. For her, this realisation gave her a more complete perspective of what her work could be, as might be inferred from the "jigsaw" metaphor in the storytelling. Nonetheless, this interpretation of the story in excerpt 4 needs to take into account the diversion that took place prior to this segment of the interview. Valerie was clearly anticipating what my questions were about and what the spiritual side meant. So, it is possible that what she said at the latter part of excerpt 4 reflected (her expectations of) the research more than her experiences.

Despite the possible ambiguity of the contexts of the storytelling in the segment of talk in excerpt 4, Valerie seemed to have only recounted the *potential* satisfaction and meaning her job held rather than her *experience* of it. This is because no other significant accounts were offered, before or after this segment of the interview, to suggest otherwise. However, Valerie's story about being able to make a difference to her patients cannot be discounted because it was not entirely incoherent with her larger narrative about work. That she had made a brief mention of "making a difference in patients' lives" (excerpt 2) and passed it off as mere "cliché" perhaps was an indication of such matters as a partially concealed experience rather than being absent entirely in the job.

Thus, for Valerie, it seems likely that any inclinations for wanting to make a difference in patients' lives, though compatible with work, were eclipsed by the need to meet sales targets. In a sense, the 'health' part of Valerie's healthcare sales job was overshadowed by the 'sales' part. By virtue of the likelihood that her inclination for meaningfulness was being overshadowed, it would have been unlikely that Valerie's inclination for meaningfulness, and by extension spiritual well-being, were related in any significant way to her sales achievements. In these ways, though the interface could have been compatible, the spiritual inclinations were likely to have been eclipsed by the need to meet work targets. Furthermore, Valerie's stories demonstrate the possible insignificant relation between spiritual well-being and work performance.

5.4 Incompatible Interface

The possibility of an incompatible interface was detected in the Loh's, Lim's, Chong's and Huang's stories of work. However, the stories that were deemed to depict an incompatible interface from Chong's and Huang's interviews were either not fully storied or were less related to work targets. As such, this analysis will focus Loh's and Lim's stories instead.

5.4.1 Incompatible, Negative

From Loh's and Lim's stories, an incompatible interface can be observed to have led to a negative relation between spiritual well-being and work performance (see Table 5.8).

Table 5.8: Initial general impressions – Loh and Lim

Research participant	The interface between the inclination for meaningfulness and work targets	The relation between spiritual well-being and work performance
Loh (fourth healthcare sales job)	Storied an on-going dilemma where she eventually resisted pursuing a sales strategy because she believed it could possibly jeopardize patients' health.	Loh resisted the sales strategy because it contradicted with her values and beliefs in wanting to help patients and meet her sales targets simultaneously. As a result, she sacrificed potential sales.
Lim (stories of his one and only healthcare sales job)	Told stories about unscrupulous business activities that contradicted with his beliefs of how his work should be about helping patients.	Recounted a time when he recorded lower sales achievements because he was turning down clients that were engaged in unethical business practices.

The stories from Loh's interviews that depicted an incompatible interface were far more elaborate than in Lim's. Furthermore, Lim's interview was not audio-recorded and hence posed additional interpretive challenges. As such, the following examination will focus on Loh's experiences.

5.4.1.1 Loh

Introduction

Loh is a 33 year-old lady who initially entered the workforce as a sales executive in the manufacturing industry. She left the job after a year and spent the next eight and a half years as a healthcare sales representative in four healthcare sales companies. During that time, Loh had had experience in pharmaceutical and medical devices sales, and in all three market sectors.

Several types of interfaces were potentially observed in Loh's stories about her work. However, the following analysis focuses only on selected stories of her fourth healthcare sales job that seemed to have depicted an incompatible interface. At that time, she promoted pharmaceutical drugs for post-transplant patients to nephrologists at private as well as at government hospitals.

Narrative

At the onset of her description about her fourth healthcare sales job, Loh noted that selling immunosuppressant drugs for post-transplant patients posed challenges that were different from her previous experience in pharmaceutical sales. She considered the fourth healthcare sales job to be 'life-saving' in some respects. I then asked how she experienced the job to be different. She gave several examples, all of which pertained to the sense of responsibility she felt while promoting drugs with potentially life-threatening side effects. The following excerpt is one example (see excerpt 1).

Excerpt 1

"Actually it's very common for the transplant patient to develop cancer because they are taking immunosuppressant. [Oh, that is one of the-] Just remember, because the immune system being suppressed, suppressed, you know. Immune system being suppressed. [Cancer cells can proliferate.] Right, especially for, you're right under the sun, skin cancer is very common. You need to take the, mmm, mmm, the sun, [Sun screen.] screen. Yeah, (*a lot of things*). You need to do a lot of precautions. And also there's another, they call PTLN, post-transplant lymphoma disorder, is very common as well. So, these are the things, we'll try to check with the doctor, are there any patients, I mean, I would say that for transplant portfolio right, we're very patient-focus is because there are not many transplant patients in Malaysia. There are not many. So for me, I also feel that my responsibility is there, you know. I'm, I'm also always think, mmm, I wouldn't ask the doctor to switch to my product, mmm, just because I want that sales, to be honest, no. I will, I will, I will rather the doctor switch to our product, really because it will help the patients, and I want the patients to do well."

I wondered where the idea of being ‘patient-focus’ came from. It intrigued me because it was a term she used earlier in the interview to refer to her second healthcare sales job. My probing questions about it led her to story a current dilemma she faced:

Excerpt 2

“[When you said about patient-focus, you mentioned one word there.] Yeah [That patient-focus thing, is it a team thing, a company thing, or a you thing?] Actually mmm, it’s a company thing, company thing. Team, I’m not sure (^laughs^). And is my, my own thing. I really cause, even though my boss ask me to, because you know why, the reason why I, I really focus on patient because, mmm, in (Government Hospital A) right, we are trying to con-, mmm, convert some of the transplant patient who are on (Competitor drug X) to this (Drug A), (generic name of Drug A) we call. [Which is your new product?] My new product. And the doctor actually agreed. And I’m the one who’s really worried. Because, mmm, our product right, it come with A.E., it’s quite, quite high incidence of A.E., adverse events. It shows like out of 10 patients, sometimes 5 or 6 patients, they would develop A.E. you know, ulcer, oedema. So that’s why, that’s the reason why most of the, the nephrologist right, they wouldn’t, they wouldn’t, mmm, mmm, change their patient, just convert like that, you know. They don’t want to rock the boat if let’s say nothing happen. Because because, mmm, mmm, it’s very precious, you know, the organ that they got it. It’s very precious. So that’s why mmm (.) mmm yeah, my boss actually say that the doctor agreed, you know, to, to convert that time. I was the one that I’m really not comfortable with it because I’m very worried. I’m not sure what’s going to happen to the patients.

The full story surrounding this dilemma is too long to be reproduced here. Hence, I provide a summarised account of this segment of talk. After the segment in excerpt 2, Loh related her manager’s reasons for supporting the switch, which were: (1) that the competitor drug was no longer being actively represented and may eventually be phased out, and (2) that it will be more cost-effective for Government Hospital A to stock up only one drug of a similar class. Despite agreeing with these reasons, Loh felt that it still was not justifiable to switch these patients to her drug. Excerpt 3 shows how she concluded the story of her dilemma:

Excerpt 3

“So when I mention patient-focus is like, what I mean you know, I also care for the patient. I don’t want, you imagine if that is your relative or anyone that you love. Would you want to shift your father? Your father is already doing well with the current regimen, why would you change? That you don’t see a need to change, you know. I would rather capture the new market instead of getting someone that already doing well, then you convert them. I’m not comfortable, actually (...Loh expands on her reasons to oppose the switch. The conversation subsequently shifts to her dispute with her manager on the issue...) So for me it’s like, although (*I want patients*) but I don’t want, I don’t want these kinds of business like, mmm, taking the risk of the –[Okay.] I don’t know, because I believe that, I believe what I

believe will help the patients, you know. If I don't believe it, then I'm not sure whether this is the right thing to do or not. I'm that kind of person."

Analysis

The narrative interview method seemed to have suited Loh's way of conveying her experiences. The above stories about her fourth healthcare sales job show a mix of events and experiences, even imaginary ones (where she imagined loved ones as patients undergoing the drug switch). Perhaps less obvious in the excerpts (stories in written form) were her vivid and animated expressions and her tone, which was passionate and enthusiastic. These observations about Loh's storytelling indicated to me that she was among the participants who were perhaps more affective when relating what her jobs meant to her.

One of the overarching elements in all three excerpts was Loh's heartfelt concern for the welfare of patients amidst contexts that were seemingly insensitive to them. What seems evident in excerpt 1 was the sense of a moral responsibility in promoting her drugs. Loh experienced this job to be different from her previous pharmaceutical sales experience because there were serious side effects associated with her drugs and equally serious implications for patients from promoting the drugs irresponsibly. Hence, she emphasised how sales calls frequently included discussions about patients. Assuming that her nephrologists (clients) were also as, if not more, patient-oriented, Loh's approach to sales in this job seems well-suited.

But that does not seem to have been the case from Loh's sales manager's point of view. It became clear in excerpt 2 that being patient-focus was not necessarily a value her team members espoused, at least not to the extent Loh took it to be. This conflict of values within her and her sales manager led to a disagreement. The general medical practice of nephrologists to switch drugs only when indicated (Loh explained that transplant patients are commonly placed on long-term pharmaceutical therapy to suppress the immune system so to prevent the body from rejecting the transplanted organs) and her drug's potential side effect was convincing enough for Loh to view the strategy as irresponsible.

However, her manager's reasons for supporting the switch were not insensible or indifferent to what Loh felt to have been a conflict of values (see summary in paragraph between excerpts 2 and 3). In a sense then, the conflict was predicated upon different emphases; on patient welfare in Loh's case and on collective financial benefits for both the

hospital and sales company in her manager's case. This perhaps points to the different areas of concern between healthcare sales representative and sales managers. The former may tend to be more in touch with matters on the ground, as in patient welfare, while the latter may presumably be more concerned with company-level issues, as in the bottom line and achievement of key performance indices.

At points, the idea to switch patients resembled a dilemma for Loh. This can be observed in excerpt 3 where she explicitly says that she wants the patients and the corresponding sales it would have brought. This is because the strategy to switch existing patients on a competitor's drug would likely yield a significant uptake in sales (Loh explained that the transplant pharmaceutical sales market typically records gradual changes in drug use, reflecting the generally slow increase or decrease in the number of post-transplant patients under treatment in the country). The words "I don't know" (excerpt 3) at the latter part of this segment of talk perhaps indicated her feeling the loss of, what might have been, an opportunity for increased sales.

Loh's eventual decision not to pursue the switch was predicated upon how she felt, that is, she was "not comfortable" (excerpts 2 and 3). This was enacted when she reasoned, via a rhetorical question that creatively imagined one of the patients as her father or a close relative; it was not worthwhile to jeopardize the patient's health for the potential sales she would receive. Her apprehension about it was because she was "not sure whether this is the right thing to do" (excerpt 3) and thus, to Loh, switching patients within the existing circumstances was morally questionable. Instead, she opted to "capture the new market" (excerpt 3) which meant taking the slower route to getting sales. What is perhaps even more notable about the above story was that Loh, at that moment during the first interview, was behind her quarterly sales targets. That she would forgo potential sales and sales incentives lends credibility to her narrative, that patients' welfare was important to her.

From this selection of Loh's stories about her fourth healthcare sales job, it seemed very likely that the interface between the inclination for meaningfulness and the need to meet work targets were incompatible. Loh's stories seem to indicate that the 'healthcare' part of the job assumed greater priority over the 'sales' part, probably resulting in the loss of sales. As such, it is possible that the incompatibility of the interface led to lower sales achievements and thus suggests a negative relation between spiritual well-being and work performance.

5.5 Absent interface

The inclination for meaningfulness or spiritual inclinations were occasionally unapparent in some of the participants' stories of their experiences of work. In most cases, the absence of stories regarding spiritual inclinations seemed replaced by an overwhelming emphasis on sales achievements.

5.5.1 Absent, Insignificant

The absence of stories resembling spiritual inclinations in the participants' stories of work strongly suggests an insignificant relation between spiritual well-being and work performance. This was observed in the stories told by seven participants (see Table 5.9). For Yeoh and Alan, this was generally observed in a majority of their stories of work. For Goh, Chong, Yong, Emily and Loh, this was only observed in some of their stories of work, usually related to a specific and prior job. Thus, only Yeoh's and Alan's stories possibly depict the absent interface as a more universal experience of their jobs.

Between Yeoh and Alan, I have selected to present Yeoh's stories for analysis because the experiences he storied are more recent than in Alan's. The consideration of the other five participants' stories regarding a possible absent interface will included in the analysis in section 5.5.2.

5.5.1.1 Yeoh

Introduction

After three years in the fast-moving consumer goods industry, also Yeoh's first job, he joined the pharmaceutical sales industry and was five years in when he participated in this research. By then, at the age of 31, he had risen from an entry-level position to the highest possible position a sales representative can occupy in his company. Yeoh had met his sales targets for four of out of his five years and had also won the top sales representative award (company-wide) in 2012. He had a wide range of experience having promoted drugs across all the major therapeutic areas available in his company and has experienced servicing all three markets sectors.

Table 5.9: Initial general impressions Yeoh, Alan, Goh, Chong, Yong, Emily and Loh

Research participant	The interface between the inclination for meaningfulness and work targets	The relation between spiritual well-being and work performance
Yeoh (stories of his one and only healthcare sales job)	There were very little significant stories of events or experiences relating to the meaning of work beyond pay, promotions and incentives.	Very likely to be insignificant since stories that relate to the inclination for meaningfulness and spiritual inclinations seemed absent from his stories of work.
Alan (stories of his second healthcare sales job)	Alan's stories were mostly focused on his career advancement, his sales achievements and his incentives. Though a limited aspect of his experience possible relates to the notion of meaning, these seem largely peripheral to his experience of work.	Interpreted to be insignificant because the bulk of his stories do not relate or resemble what might be possible spiritual inclinations in the workplace.
Goh (stories of her first healthcare sales job)	Storied the job as being "further away" from the patient and felt like she "didn't really touch the patient somehow".	Likely to be insignificant due to the absence of the possibility to enact what seemed like potential inclinations for meaningfulness in the workplace.
Chong (stories of her first healthcare sales job)	Storied the job as not assisting in her quest to want to make a difference. Commented that the first healthcare sales job (pharmaceutical sales) was equated to being "just a drug pusher".	
Yong (stories of his first healthcare sales job)	Storied how he did not experience being able to help patients in the way he did during his second healthcare sales job.	
Emily (stories of her first healthcare sales job)	Storied, in retrospect, how the job provided very little intrinsic motivation.	
Loh (stories of her first healthcare sales job)	Storied the job as purely about getting sales by any means possible and nothing about "adding value" to the patients that consume their drugs.	

Narrative

The three excerpts presented here are segments of the interviews that demonstrate what Yeoh's motivations and concerns at work were. They are selected because they seem representative of his stories of his experience of work.

In the midst of exploring Yeoh's work experiences, I had asked him which market sector he preferred since he had serviced all three market sectors. In an extended response to my question, he explained why he preferred one over another. Excerpt 1 is the segment of his response about the downside of servicing the government hospital sector while excerpt 2 is the segment about the pros and cons of covering the GP sector.

Excerpt 1

“...the second drawback is, the doctors like to buy, they have already said, you know, okay, purchase this, this, this. Then comes an issue of the paperwork because government, they have a lot of bureaucratic, this one raise a purchase order, the other one needs to request, and then they send for a (local) agent, and then they get a quotation and then only they buy. So all these take process, sometimes, we have certain deadlines, we call it quarter closing. If you miss, say for example I need the sales to be in in March, obviously if it comes in April, it doesn't mean anything to me because I didn't meet my numbers anymore. [Right.] And I don't get my carrot. [Right, right.] So, yeah, that where, mmm, that's the drawback. And the second thing is, besides this, another thing is when they have everything in place, then comes the issue, the hospital did not receive enough money from the government. So they don't have the budget to buy. [Right.] So, then how? So, you are sort of like victimised in that manner. Yeah. So that's the drawback of the government.”

Excerpt 2

“GP, you can really manage your expectations, your targets. So, for example if you know your target, and you know how many doctors you need to see to get this sort of sales, whether it's doable or not, based on your past record, you can do some analysis. Well, that's how GP works. But the problem is you need to travel a lot of place. As in your car might be on-off going to each clinic. In a day, you might be seeing eight doctors. Therefore, your car on off ignition for 8 times. So you sort of like, maintenance and whatsoever, you know. Mmm, that, that's GP.”

The following represents another segment of the interview that shows, perhaps in greater detail than in excerpt 1 and 2, Yeoh's motivations at work. Excerpt 3 represents the latter part of his response to my question regarding the most fulfilling moment he had had at work. It was a story about how he managed to finally get one of his hospitals to purchase his drug for asthma despite the hospital having an equivalent drug (a competitor's) listed in their formulary.

Excerpt 3

“Before that, the competitor is there and has already did the ground work quite fast. And they got enlisted. So obviously the pharmacist is like, these two drugs are in the same class. So I just need to have one to treat asthma, I don't want to keep two, you see. It's like so bothersome. [Right.] So what happen, sort of, to me is like, I covered from January 2009, January to December, they don't buy at all. When 2010, they start to purchase, small amount but it's really sort of like shows that, wow, one year of coverage, no sales and finally came in. So it was like you felt that, you know you, at certain point, one year you can say short or long sometimes but you have been very actively going there, try to psycho yourself that there's still chance, you know, you have to think that it's possible, which is why you're motivated to go and see your doctors, although they have, every time you go, they say 'no, no, how many times have I tell you, I'm I'm, this is the endocrine centre, we don't see any asthma case' and all these thing. And finally they purchase. So that's where you felt that, oh, ground work sort of like pay off after like a whole year. Yeah, that was very fulfilling to me.”

Analysis

Yeoh seemed generally at ease with the method of the interview and its questions. He expanded on his experiences of work and provided examples to illustrate them quite freely. The interviews thus provided Yeoh a platform to talk about his successes and challenges, and from which I can infer his disposition towards his work and what it may have meant to him.

By and large, Yeoh's stories about work centred on his sales achievements. This seems obvious in all three excerpts. Excerpt 1 seems especially telling of his underlying motivation for pursuing sales. He storied how the multiple bureaucratic layers and the shortage of funds in the government hospital sector frustrated him because it caused him to miss his incentives. The segment in excerpt 2 was equally about his sales achievements; he favoured the GP sector because he could easily work out how he was going to meet his sales targets.

Although the overarching story in excerpt 3 is also about sales achievements, it documents an extended account of Yeoh's motivations. And because this segment also generally represents a lot of his stories about work, it seems to portray how Yeoh's inclinations at work centred on his sales achievements and incentives. This inference from Yeoh's stories seems consistent with what he revealed when asked hypothetically what would make him change jobs (not excerpted); his response was incentives, salary and promotions. Despite being interviewed for a total of 140 minutes across two interviews and prompted with a set of questions mostly identical to other participants, Yeoh did not seem to have referred to any possible spiritual inclinations of work to any significant extent. Furthermore, experiences which, in another participants' view, may have facilitated spiritual well-being in the workplace, even if they did surface during Yeoh's interviews, were viewed with a 'sales' lens.

It is conceivable that talking about deeper personal and spiritual issues was not something Yeoh was comfortable engaging in, much less with a stranger in a research interview. It is also possible that the range of experiences he chose to reveal during the interviews were limited to superficial and practical matters. But what seems equally likely is that spiritual inclinations did not feature significantly in Yeoh's experiences of work. In this case, the interface between the inclination for meaningfulness and work targets was non-existent. He achieved his sales target because he was driven mostly by the financial benefits and by

career opportunities. As such and in Yeoh's case, the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance was likely to be non-existent and hence insignificant.

5.5.2 Absent and other interfaces, and insignificant and other relations

Thus far, the analysis reveals the possible ways the inclination for meaningfulness interfaced with work targets and the possible relations between spiritual well-being and work performance. In order to do so, the analysis has focused on explicating *selected* stories rather than on *all* (relevant) stories within a case. This subsection is about the (larger) narratives participants may have storied, not just selected (smaller) stories. This is because the interfaces and the corresponding ways spiritual well-being may be related to work performance were not necessarily consistent throughout a participant's career, although they were for some participants.

For Loh, Goh, Chong, Yong, Emily and Lim, their respective stories of their experiences seem to indicate several types of interfaces and possibly different relations between spiritual well-being and work performance. In most cases, this variation can be observed when comparing their experience of work across different jobs. Among these six participants, Loh's stories represent an exemplary case for analysis since they depict the greatest diversity of experiences with respect to the interface and the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance.

5.5.2.1 Loh

Introduction

In eight and a half years as a sales representative in the healthcare sales industry, Loh has worked in four companies. In that time, she had worked in the pharmaceutical and medical devices industry sector, and across all market sectors. All three types of interfaces were observable from Loh's stories of work across these four jobs. Her stories also depicted several different ways spiritual well-being and work performance may or may not be related.

Narrative

The following four excerpts are stories of Loh's experience of work corresponding to each of her four jobs. The selected segments are kept brief, whenever possible, owing to large amount of texts required to depict Loh's experience in four different jobs. These segments nonetheless seem to sufficiently help relate a central experience she storied about each of these jobs.

I was enquiring about Loh's employment history when she related how she did not like her first healthcare sales job of servicing the GP and retail pharmacy market sectors. Excerpt 1 is a segment where she described her experience servicing retail pharmacists.

Excerpt 1

"And also, you know, the way you deal with retail pharmacists also very different one, you know. [Do you remember -] They are more to bonus, bonusing, it's more on pricing. They're not much value-added you can talk about. Or you can even be a runner. I even be a runner you know, in my first job. The first two months, only two months, two months in GP, right, mmm, I was doing runner job ... (talks about runner job further) ... [Were you pressured to show sales immediately?] Of course! Keep on forcing me, yeah, keep on forcing me. [Who keep on forcing?] My manager. Keep on ask me every day, every day single close, every day, you know. Ask me how much you bring in, how much you bring in. How many boxes, I just need another 100K, 100K or how many K, I remember that time. [Mmm] It's like, keep on call me, hey, every two, three hours call me one time. Every two, three hours. But I think it was the last, last week of closing."

A 'runner' can be described as someone who redistributes the products (to other clients) after making bulk sales, typically with large discounts, to one buyer. This is generally seen as an ethically-questionable tactic and is one easy way to record a large volume of sales. It also capitalises on price discounts in order to sell as opposed to selling the benefit of the products, the latter activity being more beneficial for long-term business.

The use of the term "value-added" (excerpt 1), in retrospect, was a clear reference to her second healthcare sales job and the patient workshops she conducted for her dialysis centre clients, which she storied shortly after the above segment (see excerpt 2).

Excerpt 2

"So I would say why the customer still, still prefer to work with (second healthcare sales company) that time, I mean with us, I think mainly is because of the value-added services, and that's the part that I like it. [Okay, what are the examples -] The value added? Yeah, for example, actually we would have like a disease management kind of workshop. Let's say dialysis patient, diet is something very important for them. As you know, you're aware, right? So, we will try to work it out like a diet program, we'll engage with, mmm, the nutritionist, we rope them in

to give a workshop to the patients, about diet and even I myself, I'm, I always give talk to the patient as well, I mean about the diet. (...describes other similar workshops...). So, and then we do patients' event, patient gathering. So, patient is like the centre of our (^tsk^) how to say, centre of our, our focus, you know. Whatever we have, we try to help the patients, do things for the patients. (...the conversation addresses several other related aspects but returns to her assessment about the value of the workshops...). To give talk to the patient, and this is what they need also, the dialysis they need that. The patients, they need that, and yeah, I find that this is a very good way. First thing can help the patient, you know the feeling is like (*you are there to help people*). Then you can build the rapport also. So, I think it's something good for me. This is the thing that I enjoyed a lot."

But, the opportunity to help patients or to do something similar seemed to be missing altogether in her third healthcare sales. Loh's description of her third healthcare sales job seem reminiscent of the excessive focus on sales she had experienced in her first healthcare sales job (see excerpt 3).

Excerpt 3

"...maybe in (third healthcare sales company) last time, in (third healthcare sales company) we're too, we're too sales-focused, you know, sales-driven until we forgot that part. Actually if let's say if I only enter, every day I will be in the OT. Every day, I'm with the doctors together with the patients, and I manage to develop that kind of professional relationship, maybe I will have a different feeling already. But, mmm, sadly to say that in (third healthcare sales company), I have not develop that kind of, I have not, mmm, (.) I don't see myself at that level yet. I'm at a level which is one level down, sales-driven."

Unlike the three earlier healthcare jobs, two types of interfaces seem observable from Loh's stories of her fourth healthcare sales job. The incompatible interface and the possible negative relation between spiritual well-being and work performance of Loh's fourth healthcare sales job have already been examined in section 5.4.1. The following analysis focuses on interview segments that depict the possible compatible interface. Specifically, excerpt 4 shows Loh relating to me an interaction she had with one of her doctors while excerpt 5 shows Loh contrasting her experience of the fourth healthcare sales job with the second healthcare sales job.

Excerpt 4

"There's one time there's doctors say that the patient just done the transplant and the patient mmm showing thrombocytopenia, drop of mmm, mmm, white blood cell. So ask me, 'Could it be related to one of my product?' Prod-b, it's another product. It's induction therapy. Then I said, oh then I concern, you know, adverse event right. Straight away I go and find a lot of data. Actually it shows that mmm, mmm, by using our product right, actually it's supposed to have a lower risk of thrombocytopenia. And after that, doctor also feel that the evidence is not that solid. So, yeah. That kind of engage, ah, this is the thing I'm, I'm talking about."

Excerpt 5

“Mmm, so, this job right, now is like, mmm, I gain my happiness is like through the, the discussion with the doctors. It’s like, I really bring some value to them you know. The professional kind of value. You get what I mean? [Yeah, I do.] Yeah, so it’s a different kind of happiness. So, if you ask me, am I as happy as those day, I would say it’s different, it’s a different kind of happiness. Now it’s like satisfied, mmm, kind of like, you, you feel that very satisfied, through the, mmm, through the, the, like the discussion right, you managed to actually mmm, mmm, bring the doctor to understand, and then to convert the patients, and once you see the patients is doing well right, that kind of satisfying.”

Analysis

It is very plausible that Loh preferred working in an environment that allowed her to simultaneously contribute towards some greater good *and* meet her sales commitments. Fulfilling the latter without the former for Loh, as shown in her stories of her first and third healthcare sales job, was regarded as work that was less meaningful. As such, Loh’s stories relate to spiritual inclinations (or its absence) in that they seem to reflect her inclination to seek deeper meaning in her work, her need for her actions to be congruent with her values and her aspiration to enact at work what she deemed important.

Loh explicitly noted that she did not like the work she did in her first healthcare sales job (see excerpt 1). In her experience, the emphasis in the GPs and Retail Pharmacy sector seemed to be mostly commerce-centred. This seemed especially evident from her admission to being a ‘runner’ early in the job and her resentment to being pressured for sales. What was missing from the job was seemingly the lack of opportunities for Loh to add value, although she was not explicit what adding value meant at that point in the interview.

On the other hand, her stories about the second healthcare sales job seemed to be largely about adding value. Loh liked the job because it gave her plenty of opportunities to “help the patients” (excerpt 2). In addition to that, the workshops were seemingly an important aspect of dialysis centres’ services to its patients. In exchange for her services, her dialysis centres were more likely to purchase her drugs for their patients. Thus the second healthcare sales job seemed to have been an ideal setting where Loh was able to meet her inclinations to want to make a difference while meeting her sales obligations.

It is perhaps more than coincidence that Loh described her first healthcare job in contrast to the second. What she did not experience in the first was experienced in the second. If we assume that helping patients was significantly meaningful a task for Loh, then the first

healthcare sales job lacked that meaning. In this way, I could posit that the possibility of the interface was possibly *absent* in Loh's first healthcare sales job. Her experience of the interface in the second healthcare sales job, on the other hand, was one of *compatibility* since she was able to help patients (*the inclination for meaningfulness*) while meeting her sales obligations (*need to meet work targets*). In a sense, Loh's motivations to help patients and her sales achievements in the second healthcare sales job would have been closely and positively related.

Loh's stories of her third healthcare sales job seem reminiscent of the first healthcare sales job; it was "too sales-focused" (excerpt 3). This time, however, instead of implying an absence of meaning, she storied her inability to achieve the level of meaning that she perhaps experienced in the second healthcare sales job and that she perhaps believed was also possible in the third. It is thus more likely to describe Loh's experience of the interface then as *compatible but eclipsed by work targets*. Despite the absence of deeper meaning in the job, Loh met her sales targets for two of three years she was in the job, prompting the assessment that spiritual well-being may not have had any significant relation with her work performance during that period.

Loh's experience of meaning at work evolved again when she moved to her fourth healthcare sales job. The job was deemed satisfying because it still enabled her, via her interaction with doctors in this case, to provide services that added value to her patients (see excerpts 4 and 5). Excerpt 4, like many other interview segments regarding significant moments of her experiences of work, illustrates Loh's concern for how her work ultimately impacted her patients. And if such services from healthcare sales representatives are prized by her clients, it is likely that Loh's approach to the job will have a positive impact on her sales numbers.

Relatedly, Loh's emphasis on the patients' welfare is very likely the reason why she felt so strongly against switching post-transplant patients who are responding well to a drug regime to her drugs (see full story of the incompatible interface in section 5.4.1.1). And despite the pressures from her manager to promote the switch and from declining potential sales, she resisted acting on it. Therefore, Loh's stories of her fourth healthcare sales job related to moments when the interface was *compatible* and *incompatible*, leading to the corresponding *positive* and *negative* relations between spiritual well-being and work performance.

As such, the larger narrative from Loh's stories about her experience of work seems to be the inconsistency of the interface as well as variety of ways spiritual well-being and work performance may have been related across her career. Hence, there is a possibility that spiritual inclinations at work are not necessarily uniform experiences, either across different jobs or even within a single job. Additionally, there did not seem to be compelling evidence that this inconsistency had any significant consequence on Loh's actual sales achievements. Except for the duration of one and a half years, Loh has met her sales targets for the other 7 years 2 months in healthcare sales (see Table 5.10).

Table 5.10: The interface, the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance and sales achievements – Loh.

Healthcare sales job	Interface	Relation*	Duration of employment	Duration of sales target met
1st	Absent	Insignificant	2 months	2 months
2nd	Compatible	Positive	4 years	4 years
3rd	Absent	Insignificant	3 years	2 years
4th	Compatible Incompatible	Positive Negative	1.5 years	1 year
Total			8 years, 8 months	7 years, 2 months

*Note: * Relation between spiritual well-being and work performance.*

As such, the inconsistent experience of the interface and the corresponding varying relation between spiritual well-being and work performance in Loh's experience did not seem to have any overwhelming and immediate influence on her actual sales achievements. Hence, the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance across time and across jobs in Loh's case is likely to be insignificant.

5.6 Findings

The starting point for the analysis in this chapter was my initial general impressions of the participants' stories, and whether their stories depict the interface between the inclination for meaningfulness and the need to meet work targets to be compatible, incompatible or absent. The preceding analyses of their stories, building upon the initial three types of interfaces, resulted in six possible narrative themes. These narratives themes represent the different ways inclinations for meaningfulness could have interfaced with the need to meet

work targets and the corresponding ways spiritual well-being and work performance were possibly related (see Table 5.11).

Table 5.11: Narrative themes based on the interface and the relation of spiritual well-being and work performance

Narrative theme	The interface between the inclination for meaningfulness and work targets	The relation between spiritual well-being and work performance
1	Compatible	Positive
2	Compatible	Insignificant
3	Compatible (inclination for meaningfulness eclipsed)	Insignificant
4	Incompatible	Negative
5	Absent	Insignificant
6	A combination of two or more types of interface	Insignificant

Expectedly, the analysis shows that the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance can be positive. By positive, I mean to say that the employees' spiritual well-being was observed to have possibly led to an enhancement of their work performance. This finding, exemplified by the *first narrative theme*, supports empirical studies that suggest a positive correlation between spiritual well-being and work performance (see Duchon and Plowman, 2005; Fry et al., 2011; Kinjerski and Skrypnek, 2008; Kolodinsky et al., 2008; Rego and Cunha, 2008).

Relatedly, the positive relation between spiritual well-being and work performance was observed only when the interface was compatible. Again, this seems consistent with literature identified in Chapter 2 which argue that the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance may be an influence of an alignment between employees and their work (see Dehler and Welsh, 1994; Jurkiewicz and Giacalone, 2004; Kinjerski and Skrypnek, 2004; Lewin and Regine, 2001). As such, the first narrative theme lends credibility to existing findings and theoretical arguments found in the literature.

But, the analysis also shows how a compatible interface may be accompanied by an insignificant relation between spiritual well-being and work performance. This finding is based on the *second and third narrative themes*. In essence, what these narrative themes depict is that the alignment between employees and their work may be inconsequential to

how well one performs at work. In a sense, this finding contradicts the first finding as well as the corresponding findings and theoretical arguments in the literature. This perhaps also undermines the findings of a majority of survey-statistical research that naturally assume the occurrence of enhanced spiritual well-being and work performance levels to be related. The second and third narrative themes suggest another possibility, that despite the alignment between one's spiritual inclinations and one's work, the relation between one's spiritual well-being with one's work performance can be insignificant.

Additionally, the prospect of a non-relation between spiritual well-being and work performance was observed in other narrative themes, such as in the *fifth narrative theme* (I discuss the sixth narrative theme later). Firstly, this is a reminder that not all employees may exhibit the need to fulfil their spiritual inclinations at work, though this does not preclude that they may exhibit such inclinations in other jobs or in the future. Perhaps employees view work as satisfying other levels of needs, as Maslow's theory of the Hierarchy of Needs would suggest. Secondly, spiritual well-being is not likely to be a prerequisite for work performance. As such, spiritual inclinations or well-being should neither be assumed to be universally desired among employees nor critical for employees to do well at work.

Not only is spiritual well-being possibly not critical for work performance, it is also likely to have a negative influence on work performance. The participants' storied experiences, represented in the *fourth narrative theme*, demonstrate that the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance can be negative when employees experience the interface to be incompatible. This finding contradicts many existing empirical findings and perhaps affirms the calls for research in the area to move beyond merely examining the possible performative benefits and emphasising only its positive aspects (see Case and Gosling, 2010; Lips-Wiersma et al., 2009 and criticisms of research in the area in Section 2.4). It also raises questions about other manifestations of spiritual inclinations in the workplace that organisations deemed less desirable which until now has escaped scrutiny.

Thus far, the first to the fifth narrative themes seem to show that the experiences of spiritual inclinations and spiritual well-being in the workplace, its interface with work and its relation to work performance are diverse. These, however, only depict *selected* experiences from the participants. This diversity of experiences can nevertheless be also

observed in two other ways. First, this diversity was recorded across six of the participants who belonged to the same team in the same company (see Table 5.12).

Table 5.12: Narrative themes observed across the participants employed in one company

Narrative theme	The interface between the inclination for meaningfulness and work targets	The relation between spiritual well-being and work performance	Participant (pseudonym)
1	Compatible	Positive	Chong, Yong
2	Compatible	Insignificant	Goh, Huang
3	Compatible (inclination for meaningfulness eclipsed)	Insignificant	Valerie
4	Incompatible	Negative	Chong*, Huang*
5	Absent	Insignificant	Alan, Chong, Goh, Yong
6	A combination of two or more types of interface	Insignificant	Chong, Goh, Yong, Huang

** Their stories of the interface were either not fully developed or only peripherally related to work targets.*

Assuming that the work these six participants engaged in as healthcare sales representatives were similar in many respects, the diversity of stories of the interface from these six participants helps underscore the observed experiential diversity of spiritual inclinations and spiritual well-being among ground-level employees. What this indicates is that, despite the many possible similarities inherent in a job, there is presumably at least an equal amount of diversity within the job itself or in the way the individual employee interprets his or her job that gives rise to the diversity of the interface as well as to the diverse relations between spiritual well-being and work performance.

Second, the *sixth narrative theme* indicates that it was possible for individual employees, across several jobs or even within one job, to experience several types of interfaces and several ways spiritual well-being to be related to work performance. This diversity of experiences suggests that the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance over a period of time is like to vary, hence is impermanent. And because all the participants who storied more than one type of interface (see section 5.5.2) were generally consistently meeting their work targets, the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance may possibly be insignificant.

Interestingly, this diversity was also observed in the participants' stories regarding the meaning of their work. While it was common for them to refer to general notions of meaning such as 'making a difference', 'creating an impact', 'being of service to others' or 'adding value' in their stories, each of the participants' stories seemed distinctive. The way one participant may have experienced 'making a difference' in his or her job was markedly different from the way another participant may have experienced his or hers. This suggests that the observed diversity in the interface and in the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance may be predicated upon the uniqueness of their experience of work.

With specific regard to the central focus of this research, the analysis and the above findings suggest that the positive relation between spiritual well-being and work performance, though possible, is expected to be *transient*, *mutable* and *fragile*. First and foremost, there is a range of 'positive-ness' (in the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance) that can be inferred from participants' stories. Secondly, it seemed the observed positive relation may be easily subjected to change, especially with a change in jobs. Thirdly, the positive relation between spiritual well-being and work performance was possibly a limited experience. Out of the four participants whose stories depicted the first narrative theme, only in two participants (Chong and Emily) did it seem to reflect their general experience of work. Even then, the stories only illustrated their experience in their then current jobs rather than in all their previous jobs.

Nevertheless, a positive relation between spiritual well-being and work performance seems plausible. From the foregoing analysis, there are perhaps four criteria for the positive relation between spiritual well-being and work performance:

- 1) that employees are inclined spiritually to a considerable extent,
- 2) that there are avenues for employees to experience their jobs as satisfying their spiritual inclinations,
- 3) that satisfying their spiritual inclinations is largely compatible with achieving their work targets, and
- 4) that employees are sufficiently motivated by the compatible interface as a means to meet both spiritual needs and work targets.

The absence of at least one of these criteria was observed when the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance was not positive, as in the participants' stories that were depicted by the second to the fifth narrative themes.

Criterion (2) stands out as an aspect that warrants further attention in this research. This is because, apart from possibly helping to explain the distinctiveness of the participants' experiences of meaningfulness at work, the criterion may be crucial for shedding additional light on how the interface can be compatible (criterion 3) and how the compatible interface motivates employees to meet their work targets (criterion 4), provided of course that employees are inclined spiritually (criterion 1). This observation foregrounds the need to specifically examine how employees engage with their contexts, for instance, how their awareness of and responsiveness to primary work activities contribute to experiencing the job as satisfying their spiritual inclinations. As such and as noted in the third ancillary research question, this research aims to also examine the ways in which features and contexts of the ground-level employees' work facilitates (or not) the experience of meaningfulness.

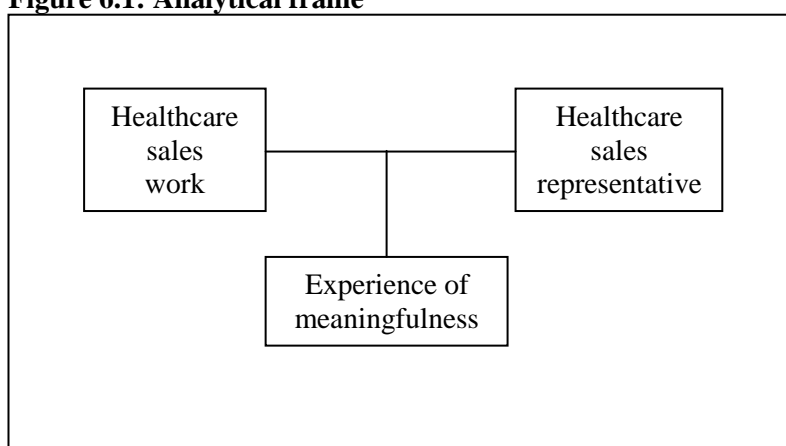
5.7 Concluding remarks

Thus far, the analysis shows that not only is the experience of the interface among the participants varied, the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance may equally be varied. Additionally, the likelihood of a positive relation between spiritual well-being and work performance may be transitory. The analysis also foregrounds the need to examine the ways participants engage with their work and the possible ways they may respond to features and contexts of their work. In so doing, this research perhaps can provide empirical explanations on how the employee experiences the job to be satisfying his or her spiritual inclinations, which in turn would further its understanding of the diverse interfaces and the equally diverse ways spiritual well-being may be related to work performance. These will be the focus of Chapter 6.

Chapter 6 Analysis and findings – the construction of meaningfulness and spiritual well-being in the workplace

The analysis and findings in Chapter 5 suggests that this research also needs to examine the possible distinctive ways participants engaged with their work, its contexts and features, and how this engagement facilitated (or not) their experience of meaningfulness. The analytical frame for this chapter can thus be represented by the engagement between the domains of ‘Healthcare sales representative’ and ‘Healthcare sales work’ with regard to their ‘Experience of meaningfulness’ (see Figure 6.1):

Figure 6.1: Analytical frame



Re-examining the participants’ stories with this focus also seems consistent with the ancillary research questions (see section 3.3). In so doing, it is possible that this research may glean a fuller account of the possible narratives about spiritual inclinations and spiritual well-being at work, its seeming significance and possible influences for ground-level employees.

6.1.1. Building a model of the experience of meaningfulness in the workplace

Because this chapter examines the experiences of meaningfulness in the workplace, it will focus only on participants where the inclination for meaningfulness or spiritual inclinations were observable from their stories of work. Among these participants, the stories from Yong, Loh, Emily and Huang are selected for analysis because they seem to illustrate several comparative yet contrasting ways their experience of meaningfulness were storied.

Additionally, their stories seem to generally illustrate the experiences of other participants whose inclinations for meaningfulness were also observable from their stories.

As in Chapter 5, the analysis of each of the participants' narratives in this chapter will constitute three main sections, namely the Introduction, Narrative and Analysis. A model of the experience of meaningfulness in the workplace, based on the analytical frame, will be built and expanded upon alongside the analysis of each of these selected participants' stories. Thereafter, the chapter ends with a discussion of the possible findings.

6.1.1.1 Yong

Introduction

Yong is a 30 year-old man with seven years of working experience. The latter five years were spent in healthcare sales wherein he worked as a pharmaceutical sales representative in the first three years and as a medical devices sales representative in the subsequent two years. Until at the point of the interviews, Yong had never missed his yearly sales target. While Yong seemed to have storied certain aspects of his medical devices sales representative job as particularly satisfying, he also voiced his dissatisfaction over having to chase for sales during the monthly sales closing periods.

Narrative

I present four segments of talk from Yong's interviews in the sequence with which they took place. These segments depict the possible meaningfulness he storied about his job, the way he could have related these meanings with his sales achievements and a glimpse of his beliefs about the significance of work and life.

After hearing briefly from Yong about his employment history, I had asked him which he preferred, the pharmaceutical or medical device sales sectors (see excerpt 1).

Excerpt 1

“[I: Which one do you prefer, at this point in time?] I'm actually enjoying what I do right now. I'm actually enjoying because, one reason is, sometimes over here in medical, comparing in pharma, over here there is this satisfaction that is not able to be found in pharma, where there were cases where a lot of very, very poor patients, and not able to actually pay for their medical equipments. I am actually here to actually help them apply for funds through (cancer association) or any non, I mean those social welfare bodies, where we can actually help them to apply for all these

equipment given the right documentations. So it's actually through the social welfare, and they're actually quite a tedious process over here, but once you are able to get things across, the satisfaction is only you yourself knows, how, how, how satisfied you are, to actually bring the thing across to that very poor patient, to have that surgery on, and successful."

Subsequent to the segment in excerpt 1, Yong, in response to my prompts, explained the contexts behind the story. It all took place in one of his sales account, a government hospital which was short on funds and therefore could not purchase his devices. However, there were occasional cases, usually involving patients inflicted with late-stage cancer, where surgeons at the said government hospital preferred to use his devices because they generally led to better surgical outcomes. This, in turn, led to patients purchasing the devices for their own surgeries though not all patients could afford to pay for them.

Yong then chanced upon a social welfare association branch office located within the hospital that allocated funds for cancer patients on a case by case basis and sought to help his doctors and some of their patients capitalise on the available funding. He facilitated the application process, liaising with his doctors, their patients and his company to prepare the necessary documents for the social welfare body. Even though it required him to go out of his way, essentially increasing his workload, Yong seemed to have approached it wholeheartedly because of the patients' life-threatening medical circumstances.

Midway through this stretch of talk, I had enquired about the volume of the funding by the social welfare body. Excerpt 2, part of Yong's response to my question, shows how he related the funding he helped patients apply for with his sales achievements:

Excerpt 2

"So that is, that is one of the extra channels that we are able to get some funds besides depending on the conventional funds. Not much, maybe 2,000 Ringgit a month, comes to like 24,000 a year. So that's extra 24,000 for me, in my sales. So, if things, I mean, if I can be luckier, then perhaps it could be 36,000 or 48,000. So, it depends."

Shortly after Excerpt 2, I asked Yong if he could recount an interaction he had had with a patient. Yong replied affirmatively and related to me how he had, for the two initial funding applications, acted as an interpreter for the social welfare staff and the patients while the patients were being interviewed about their request for funding. After describing the interpreter task briefly, Yong recounted this story to me (see excerpt 3):

Excerpt 3

“I actually met a patient where I actually felt so sad for the patient because the husband, okay, the wife is the one that had cancer. The husband passed away like three months ago due to cancer. The husband, mmm, is a worker in a coffin shop, the shop that sells coffins. The wife goes to a coffee shop to be a waitress over there to help serve coffee or to help serve tea to people, where she’s earning only like 800 Ringgit a month. They have four children, the husband passed away three months ago due to cancer and right now, this lady has cancer. Four children, no one to take care, eldest being like eight years old, youngest being like five, six months old baby. And right now, the mother is in such a particular stage. So we’re trying to ask for surgical equipments for them, and by listening to their story, because this is the first two patients that I have the opportunity to interview together, and by listening to that story, you can really feel the pain in your heart because it’s really a very bad stage. And why does this thing happen onto this particular patient? Life is just so, I mean I mean not so unfortunate to them and at the same time, husband is not here. She just left with some insurance money, like 20,000 from the husband insurance because of death, and nothing else left. 20,000 Ringgit and then she said right now I’m diagnosed with cancer. 20,000 is for the future of four children over there. Like, how long can 20,000 last for that four children? And how about their brothers and sisters? Brothers and sisters are all equally not doing well. So it’s really a tough position for that particular person. So it was sad, it was sad.”

The preceding three excerpts relate directly to Yong’s stories about what he found deeply satisfying about work. Nearer the end of the first interview, I had asked him what he liked most about his work. After noting that he liked assisting doctors in their surgeries, the conversation shifted to several topics, including his beliefs and values about what, to him, were the important things in life (see excerpt 4).

Excerpt 4

“I think life is more enjoyable with, mmm, creating values around. [Creating value] Creating values around [I think I understand what you mean by I’d rather -] Yeah, I can elaborate. I would say that the things that I do for the (cancer association) case that I was sharing with you, I believe that I created values in the patients’ life, by bringing their things across to them to their surgery. They might not know. It’s not important whether they know or not, but I think the most important is [You know.] I know, our boss up there knows.”

Analysis

Yong seemed to have storied a deep satisfaction he got from his then current job. In a sense, he was perhaps merely responding to the unique circumstances at work and capitalising on an opportunity to secure more sales. As such, the stories in excerpts 1 and 2 are about Yong fulfilling his sales responsibilities. Nevertheless, he also seemed to have seen what he did as a contribution to others who were less fortunate, health-wise and financially. It also seemed to have motivated him to assist these funding applications so that patients had access to the devices needed for their surgeries. Hence, it was possible

that the seeming deep satisfaction he got from this part of the job was predicated on what he was expected to achieve at work. This is because it would have been unlikely for Yong to have helped patients apply for welfare funding and contribute in the way that he did if the task were not to also give him additional sales. Hence, Yong's experience of meaningfulness can be said to have been shaped by his need to meet *work targets*.

Additionally, Yong's experience of meaningfulness could also be said to be shaped by the close contact he had with patients (see excerpt 3). He would probably not have gained such a deep appreciation for the patients' situation had he not been so closely involved in the funding application process. From the way Yong recounted the incident, hearing first-hand about the patients' dire circumstances seemed to have appealed to his inclinations to want to help them, which in this case was to facilitate the application of welfare funds. Hence, the meaningfulness Yong storied about his work can be said to have been shaped by close *proximity* to patients.

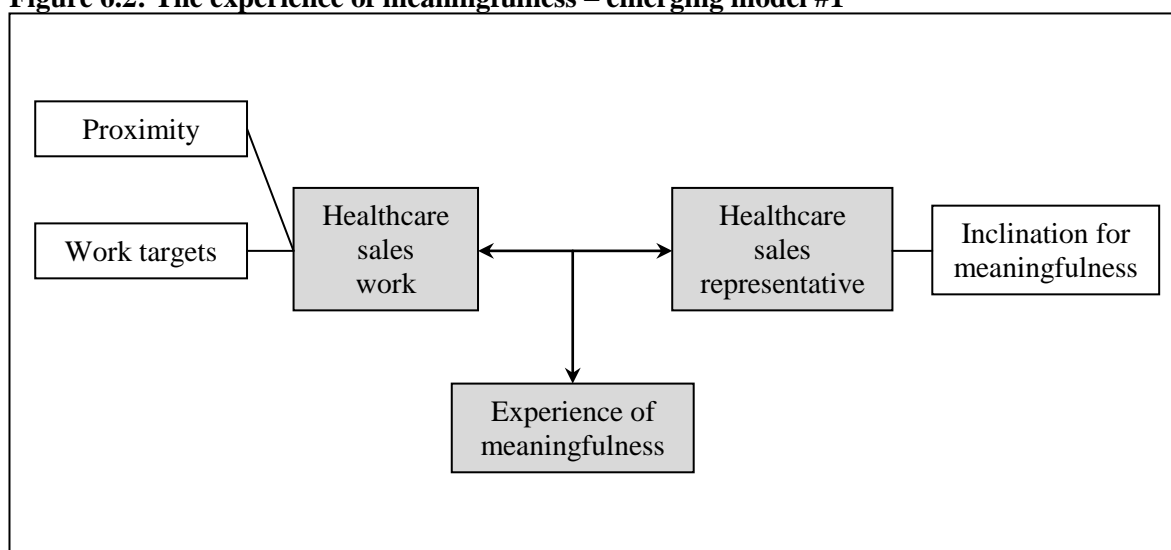
However, the aspects of *work targets* and *proximity* alone did not naturally engender Yong's experience of meaningfulness he may have storied about his job. What seems possible was that because he was naturally inclined to "create values around" (see excerpt 4), the circumstances that led him to source funds for the patients (i.e. *work targets*) and the situation brought about by being in close contact with patients (i.e. *proximity*) assisted him in crafting his work to be consistent with his inclinations for meaningfulness. Otherwise, helping patients apply for their funding and being in close contact with them would not necessarily have been deemed deeply satisfying by Yong. What this perhaps means is that it was the *interplay* between Yong's *inclinations for meaningfulness* and the contexts of his job, specifically *work targets* and *proximity*, which had been responsible for the experiences of meaningfulness he storied.

The apparent compatibility between inclinations for meaningfulness and the need to meet work targets in Yong's case is interesting. This is because the additional effort put into supporting the funding application process only generated what might have been an incommensurable amount to his sales. If so, Yong's stories may have conveyed how the quantum of sales for his efforts was less significant than the meaningfulness the task held for him. Though the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance was positive, the extent of the positive relation was perhaps small. This speaks to the influence of Yong's inclinations for meaningfulness in shaping his experiences of work.

What seems less clear from Yong's interview is how he may have shaped his experience of work differently if he was not able to meet his sales targets. Presumably, Yong may have been pressured to channel his efforts towards activities that yielded more sales instead of pursuing welfare funds for his patients or relegated the tasks of pursuing welfare funds for his patients to a lower priority.

In sum, Yong's stories seem to demonstrate how three aspects, namely (1) *work targets*, (2) *proximity* (to patients in his case), and (3) *inclinations for meaningfulness*, may have shaped the experience of meaningfulness he storied. They also seem to depict how Yong's experience of deep satisfaction in his job was shaped by the *interplay* between these three aspects. From the just concluded analysis, I can build on the initial analytical frame (see Figure 6.1) to begin depicting the ways meaningfulness was experienced by the participants (see Figure 6.2).

Figure 6.2: The experience of meaningfulness – emerging model #1



The sole two-way arrow in the figure indicates the co-influence or the interplay between the domains of Healthcare sales work and Healthcare sales representative. Non-arrow lines signify the association between aspects related to the respective domains while the sole one-way arrow in the figure indicates a unidirectional influence.

6.1.1.2 Loh

Introduction

With eight and a half years of experience in healthcare sales spanning both pharmaceutical and medical devices sales, and having worked across four different companies and across every market sector, Loh has vast experience in the healthcare sales industry. Recall that one of the narrative themes Loh's stories depicted was the sixth narrative theme (stories in this narrative theme depicted the inconsistency of the interface or the varied types of interfaces experienced across her career. See section 5.5.2.1). As such, there is a possibility that the meaningfulness of work were not uniform experiences; they were distinct to the participants and perhaps contingent upon the features of and contexts at work.

Narrative

The following excerpts depict stories relating to Loh's second, third and fourth healthcare sales jobs. Some segments of Loh's stories that were displayed for the reader in sections 5.4.1.1 and 5.5.2.1 are repeated here because these same segments, when combined with a different set of stories, seem to depict the narrative that is being developed currently. This is perhaps one example of the 're-storying quality' seemingly inherent in the stories participants tell (see section 4.2.3).

Excerpt 1 is a segment where Loh describes her experiences relating to the patient workshops she conducted for dialysis centres in her second healthcare sales job. These patient workshops proved critical to win dialysis centres (her clients) over to use the drugs she promoted. She had earlier in the interview described the job as largely to be about "value-added services" and as "patient-focused", which was what she liked about it. The excerpt begins with my attempts to prompt Loh to elaborate on what she meant about what she liked about the job:

Excerpt 1

"[So can you give me an example of, what, what do you remember -] Okay [about the work?] It's like, mmm, for example right, (.) dialysis patient, (*they are very pitiful, you know*). Actually, I really pity them. They're like, they have to go to dialysis three times a week, and then you have to keep on poke, you know. (*Two jabs every other day*), it's very painful. And then some of them, mmm, if let's say they are not covered by the, not subsidized by (the public services department) patient, or by the government-sponsor, they have to fork out their own money, right. Some of them they even, even like, mmm, they can't afford (drug a) you know, I mean the, mmm, erythropoietin, we call. They can't, mmm, even afford the injection. And when they can't afford right, their haemoglobin will, will, will start,

mmm, drop, you know. So what will happen? Actually the patient will, (*really very pitiful*), they can't even walk, you know, sometimes. You look at their face, some of them is very pale ... (describes the kinds of patient workshops she carries out for the patients in the dialysis centres) ... To give talk to the patient, and this is what they need also, the dialysis they need that. The patients, they need that, and yeah, I find that this is a very good way. First thing can help the patient, you know the feeling is like (*you are there to help people*). Then you can build the rapport also. So, I think it's something good for me. This is the thing that I enjoyed a lot."

On the other hand, Loh's stories about her third healthcare sales jobs differed strikingly from the second. In excerpt 2, Loh had just concluded telling me about her fourth healthcare sales job when I asked her how the third healthcare sales job compared with the fourth.

Excerpt 2

"I'm enjoying what I'm doing now as compared to (third healthcare sales job). I think (third healthcare sales job) is very hassle, to be honest with you. Always chase sales, chase sales. And then we always have the workshop. Always loan stock. That's the part I hate. Why should I loan the stock here and there? Loan, return, loan, return. Every week one, every week. Ah, every week. I'm boring about that already... (talks about other aspects of the fourth healthcare sales job and contrasts them with the third healthcare sales job) ... I think, maybe in (third healthcare sales job) last time, in (third healthcare sales job), we're too, we're too sales focused, you know, sales-driven until we forgot that part. Actually if let's say, if I only enter, every day I will be in the OT. Every day, I'm with the doctors together with the patients, and I manage to develop that kind of professional relationship, maybe I will have a different feeling already. But, mmm, sadly to say that in (third healthcare sales job), I have not develop that kind of, I have not, mmm, (.) I don't see myself at that level yet. I'm at a level which is one level down, sales-driven."

Interestingly, Loh described her fourth healthcare sales job, with respect to the meaning it had, as generally similar to her second. This was despite the very different contexts of work between these two jobs. In the fourth, Loh was required to interact mainly with her nephrologists; access to patients was unnecessary, perhaps even unethical. Nonetheless, she still storied the job to be about 'adding value' and being 'patient-focused', which seemed notably similar to her stories of the second healthcare sales job (see excerpt 3).

Excerpt 3

"Mmm, so, this job right, now is like, mmm, I gain my happiness is like through the, the discussion with the doctors. It's like, I really bring some value to them you know. The professional kind of value. You get what I mean? [Yeah, I do.] Yeah, so it's a different kind of happiness. So, if you ask me, am I as happy as those day, I would say it's different, it's a different kind of happiness. Now it's like satisfied, mmm, kind of like, you, you feel that very satisfied, through the, mmm, through the, the, like the discussion right, you managed to actually mmm, mmm, bring the

doctor to understand, and then to convert the patients, and once you see the patients is doing well right, that kind of satisfying.”

But Loh also described a conflict in the fourth healthcare sales job, between what she was instructed to do, i.e. switching post-transplant patients stable on a drug regime to her drugs (see section 5.4.1.1 for the full story), and her values about what work should be (see excerpt 4).

Excerpt 4

“So when I mention patient-focus is like, what I mean you know, I also care for the patient. I don’t want, you imagine if that is your relative or anyone that you love, would you want to shift your father, your father is already doing well with the current regimen. Why would you change? That you don’t see a need to change, you know. I would rather capture the new market instead of getting someone that already doing well, then you convert them. I’m not comfortable, actually.”

Analysis

The narrative in this selection of Loh’s stories seems to be a juxtaposition of moments where she was unable to experience meaningfulness (third healthcare sales job) with moments where she could (second and third healthcare sales jobs). These stories seem to reinforce some of the ideas that were inferred from Yong’s stories (see section 6.1.1.1). Excerpts 1 and 3, for instance, provide comparable yet contrasting ways Loh’s experience of meaningfulness was shaped by *work targets*, *proximity* and *inclination for meaningfulness*. In her second healthcare sales job, the patient workshops she was expected to provide to dialysis centres, in addition to being a useful way to win over sales (i.e. *work targets*), was a direct avenue for her in her job to positively contribute to patient care (i.e. *inclination for meaningfulness*). Furthermore, the close contact Loh had with her patients (i.e. *proximity*) seemed to have enhanced the prospect of her experiencing the meaningfulness she storied in her work.

Loh’s stories of her fourth healthcare sales job seem to reveal the same findings despite the qualitatively different meaning she storied about the job. The satisfaction she storied (see excerpt 3) was premised on her interaction with her doctors because the job dictated that she promote her drugs to her doctors. Thus, the features of her work potentially shaped Loh’s experience of meaningfulness. The story in excerpt 3 highlights the possibility of *proximity*, to doctors in this case, as a feature that shaped her experience of meaningfulness.

Moreover, Loh's stories about her second and fourth healthcare sales job (excerpts 1 and 3 respectively) conveyed her awareness of her responsibility to her patients and doctors, her propensity to want to add value and perhaps to do something worthwhile in her job. In short, Loh's *inclinations for meaningfulness* also shaped her experience of what was meaningful. Finally, it was perhaps in the *interplay* between *inclinations for meaningfulness*, *work targets* and *proximity* that shaped Loh's experience of meaningfulness since neither one on its own could have engendered the possible meaningfulness that she eventually storied about her work.

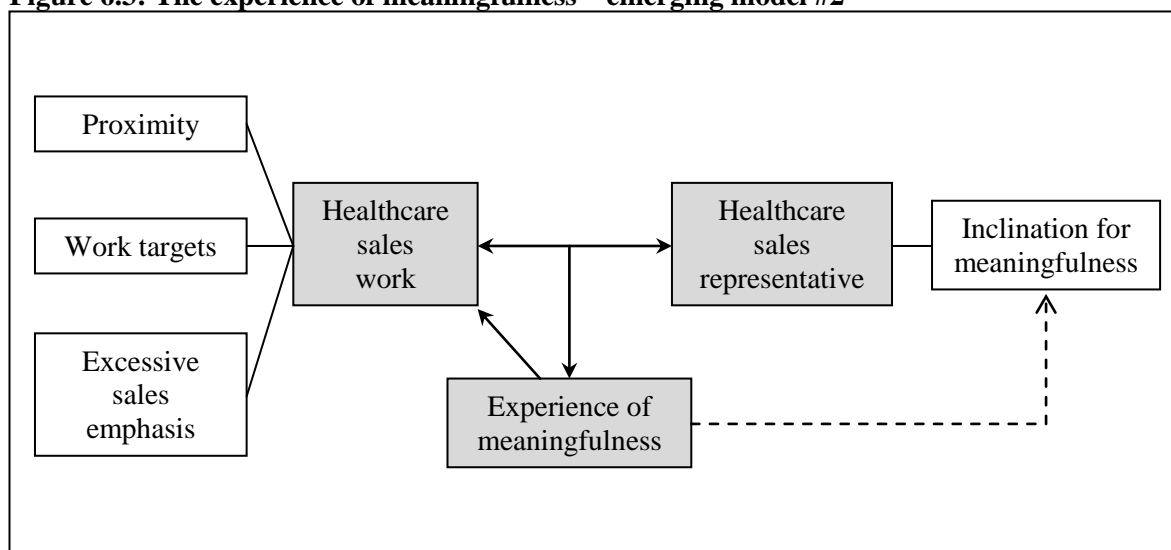
In addition to providing further support for the emerging model of the experience of meaningfulness (see Figure 6.2), Loh's stories possibly adds three additional ideas to the emerging model. Firstly, an *excessive sales emphasis* may potentially crowd out the possibility of shaping work to be meaningful. Despite the potential during the third healthcare sales job to shape work around the doctors, patients and professionalism, Loh conveyed how being "too sales focused" (excerpt 2) shifted her attention from these possibilities. Furthermore, the story in excerpt 2 revealed that she felt the work was pointless, perhaps because 'loaning stock' did not substantially 'add value' to her doctors, her patients or even to the business.

Secondly, Loh's story about the conflict she encountered in her fourth healthcare sales job (see excerpt 4) possibly showed how her experience of meaningfulness, in turn, had the potential to shape her work. Despite internal (she wanted the potential sales from switching patients) and external (her manager's instruction to pursue the switching strategy) pressures, Loh resisted switching patients seemingly because it violated her values of work, conveyed throughout the interviews to be about 'adding value' and 'focusing on patients'. The hypothetical scenario she posed, wherein her father was one of the patients, was a creative way for Loh to substantiate her argument - jeopardising patients' health for sales was wrong. Instead, she opted to "capture new market" (excerpt 4) which would have meant foregoing capitalising on the potential sales from the strategy. As such, it was likely that Loh's inclinations to 'add value', to 'focus on patients', and to 'do what was right' via her job shaped the kind of work she would and would not do.

Thirdly, Loh's experience of meaningfulness in the second healthcare sales job may have shaped her inclinations for meaningfulness in the fourth healthcare sales job. This is because of the way she was concerned for patients and their welfare in the latter job despite

having almost no access to them. On one hand, Loh's stories may have depicted how an absence of proximity to patients did not necessarily negate the possibility that the experience of meaningfulness was to be significantly related to patients. On the other hand, it could have also meant that a prior experience of meaningfulness had the potential to shape a future experience of meaningfulness. This idea seems less obvious in other participants' stories and, as such, is regarded as more tentative than other ideas developed from the analysis thus far. The combined findings from the analysis of both Loh's and Yong's stories are depicted in Figure 6.3.

Figure 6.3: The experience of meaningfulness – emerging model #2



The additional findings from Loh's stories about the experience of meaningfulness are represented in Figure 6.3 by: (1) the addition of the aspect of *excessive sales emphasis*, which can be conceived as part of the context of a healthcare sales work, (2) the single-directional arrow from 'Experience of meaningfulness' to 'Healthcare sales work', depicting the potential for the former to shape the latter, and (3) the dotted single-directional arrow from 'Experience of meaningfulness' to 'Inclination for meaningfulness', depicting the tentative idea regarding the influence of previous experiences on future experiences of meaningfulness.

Thus far, the analysis has revealed the likelihood of some aspects of work and of the ground-level employee, including the potential influences and co-influences between these aspects, which are involved in shaping the experience of meaningfulness. In the following

sections, selected stories from Emily's and Huang's interviews are examined because they seem to offer yet more insights into the possible distinctive ways the participants may have engaged with their work and how that engagement may have shaped their experience of meaningfulness in the workplace.

6.1.1.3 Emily

Introduction

Emily is a 31 year-old lady with nine years of working experience. After the initial three years in international banking, she spent three years in pharmaceutical sales and the subsequent three years in medical devices sales. Emily was a year and a half in her second medical devices company at the time of the interview. She has met her sales targets for five and a half years in her six years in healthcare sales.

Like many other participants, Emily lived to excel at what she did. Emily said she found pharmaceutical sales "too easy" and sought to satiate her desire for learning, challenge and greater contribution with her work, something she found only in second medical devices sales job. In her then current job, she promoted medical devices for a medical procedure called 'percutaneous coronary intervention' (PCI)²⁷ and assisted her physicians in their cases, occasionally with the support of her machines. Attending her physicians' cases gave her extensive experience of the medical procedure, making her an asset to the surgical team.

Narrative

I present five segments from Emily's interview. Excerpts 1 to 4 relate to stories of her then current job while excerpt 5 is how she stories her earlier experience of work.

While talking about her employment history early in the first interview, Emily said that she loved working in the then current job. Excerpt 1 is the segment where she elaborated on what she loved about it.

Excerpt 1

"So, for every cases that actually assist the doctor in, I thought that I learn a lot of

²⁷ Also known as coronary angioplasty, PCI is a procedure "used to widen blocked or narrowed coronary arteries" (NHS Choices, 2015)

things, on like approaches that they do, the techniques, why, why do they use this particular device, and not this, and when do you use this, and when do you not use this. So, the interaction that you have with the physicians are actually stronger because, as any other sales reps in the same industry, they are not allowed to go in during the procedure, for the private and confidentiality of the patient, you see. But for us, because we are part of the team. So, in a way, whatever questions you have, you are able to ask and discuss the case. So, this is actually our, how we get our value as a salesperson. That's how we distinguish ourselves from the others. So in a way, after almost three years in this industry, I find that I finally find the value that I can actually add on to the patients and to my physicians, to my customers. So, I guess that is the reason why I really enjoy what I'm doing right now. I mean, despite the really busy, busy, busy schedule. Sometimes the work will require us to work until midnight or past midnight. But I feel that that's the motivation I have."

Shortly thereafter, I asked Emily to expand on what she meant by 'value that she could add on to her patients and physicians'. She responded by pointing out how she, owing to the knowledge gained from observing many cases, was able to advise her physicians on the procedure which would have likely contributed to a higher chance of success of the procedures. This had a direct impact on patients in the cases she attended. Then, she offered the following story to illustrate her point (see excerpt 2).

Excerpt 2

"So, recently I have a few cases where the doctors actually implanted the stent and ask me 'do you think I should be doing (intervention A) with this?' I said, I think the way I look at it, I don't think so it's necessary. For me, I feel that the result is acceptable. The patient is stable, is doing fine. If you were to ask me, I think it is good enough. And they will tell you, 'Okay, so we just settle for it that way'. So, I think this comes with experience and opportunity to observe more cases and you will know sometimes too much of good things may turn into negative thing and eventually this will impact the patient."

The situation as described in the story in excerpt 2 was exceptional because the sales representative was seemingly experienced enough to advise the physician leading the procedure. This seemed like a sales advantage since her physicians, in most cases, would have probably reciprocated by using her medical devices for the cases she assisted in. Nonetheless, Emily seemed keen to avoid being seen as capitalising on such an advantage (see excerpt 3).

Excerpt 3

"In fact, mmm, I think last week I have a case whereby the patient had some financial difficulties, and they need our machine, unfortunately. So, it will mean added costs for sure. So the doctor was actually coming in and say that, mmm, 'is it okay, you know, if I use the competitor product for one of the lesion, another one I give it to you, probably it will help to bring down the cost of the this one, because of this, this, this. Straight away, without hesitating, I tell him, 'you can, anytime go

for, the two product that you need, you can go for other competitors' product, if you think it's beneficial to patient, and second, it can help the patient. Don't have any obligation just because I'm here to support the case. I am fine. [What was the doctor's response?] He said, 'I really respect you.' After the case, he come out and he tell me, 'I really never expect that to come from you'. And he said, 'probably that's the reason why you're becoming the best salesperson.' So, that time I really have no, mmm, any intentions to prove myself or whatever things. But it's because I really feel that it's not always about business. To us, in my company, what my company believe, and I truly believe any other stents company in the market, they would want the best for the patients, is to serve back the community."

However, Emily provided another explanation for responding in the way she did (in reference to the story in excerpt 3). This alternative explanation, which took place later in the interview, differed strikingly from her earlier explanation (see excerpt 4).

Excerpt 4

"...at that point, when I said that, I just uttered it out, is because (.) I, I don't want people to have second thoughts of my product. If you really feel that my product can do the job, you wouldn't have even have thought about another product, okay. So, the moment you can ask me that and you say that I use one company and the other one, I feel that the other one is like you (*felt pity*), you give to me. I look at it that way. So to me, like I said, use my product only if you believe in my product. If you think you do not believe in it, then don't use. Don't give like because I am there to support and you feel that it's an obligation, I come all the way, stayed so late for the case and then, you know, yet you this thing, I don't want that."

She subsequently went on to describe two incidences of high usage of her products, which indicated to her that her physicians currently believed that her device was the best among the existing available devices.

Emily's experience of work was storied to be very different before this third job. As I was revisiting her experience of her first and second jobs (banking and pharmaceutical sales respectively) during the second interview, I had asked her why she referred to these jobs (in the first interview) as moments when she did not "see the purpose of (her)self living in this world". The segment in excerpt 5 was her response.

Excerpt 5

"I was very young back then and it was my first, second job. To me it's money, money, money, money. I just want to earn more money, I want to buy this, I want to buy that. You know? It's more of that. So, when I was in pharma, you know I told you, the second to third year when I feel that with the kind of achievement I have, like things that I wanted to achieve, I've already achieved. So that's when I feel, so what's next? So this kind of thing like, how can I actually contribute back to society? How can I actually make an impact in other people's lives with my existence?"

Analysis

The narrative interview method suited Emily's way of conveying her experiences of work. The first interview lasted three hours with many seemingly candid and elaborate stories, of events and of experiences.

Emily's stories of work seem to echo the emerging model of the experience of meaningfulness in the workplace, as developed thus far from Yong's and Loh's stories (see Figure 6.3). This is despite the following interpretations of Emily's stories, with regard to inclinations for meaningfulness and spiritual inclinations, appearing tenuous and ambiguous at times. The following interpretations, in large part, are premised on what she said in excerpt 5 because it offered one way to make sense of her stories.

Firstly, the story in excerpt 1 shows how supporting her physicians during their procedures gave her the opportunity to contribute significantly to their practice and how these were likely to have been the source of her self-worth, esteem, motivation and fulfilment from the job. In this instance, doing what she was expected to do, with the aim to fulfil her *work targets*, can be said to have possibly shaped the meaningfulness Emily storied about the job. However, it was likely that the experience of meaningfulness was facilitated, in large measure, by her tendencies to develop her skills on the job. Emily's enthusiasm to learn the PCI procedure seemed to have led to her ability to contribute to her physician's cases. Perhaps this is an indication of how the notion of growth can be closely related to the notion of meaning.

Secondly, the aspect of *proximity*, with her physicians in Emily's case, also seemed to have shaped her experience of meaningfulness in her work. The central actor(s) in many of Emily's stories were her physicians, much like what was depicted in excerpt 2. Though she conveyed that she 'added value to patients and physicians' (see excerpt 1), this seemed to have been enacted solely via her interaction with her physicians. In a sense, the experience of meaningfulness in her work could have only been peripherally about patients since she interacted mainly with physicians. Additionally, patients did not feature significantly in Emily's stories of work despite her father, she revealed, had has undergone a PCI procedure. In this way, her experience of meaningfulness may have been shaped by the aspect of *proximity*.

Thirdly, the stories in excerpts 3 and 4 relate to the idea that the experience of meaningfulness may be constructed by the interplay between the healthcare sales representative and healthcare sales work. This interpretation, however, can appear tenuous because the stories depict how Emily gave two seemingly contrasting meanings regarding the same incident. Excerpt 3 shows Emily telling her physician to disregard any impulse to reciprocate and to instead choose the medical device that the physician deemed most suitable for the patient. Based on the physician's response in the story, Emily's stance was probably uncharacteristic of the typical sales representative in the business. Her reasons for doing so were that "it's not always about business" (excerpt 3). As such, the story possibly depicted how Emily viewed her work to be beyond commercial transactions and that perhaps patients' welfare should take precedence over whether or not she registered a sale. In a way, Emily may have avoided emphasising sales excessively and instinctively sought to preserve the meaningfulness of work she was perhaps more inclined towards.

But Emily's choice of the term "it's not always about business" perhaps reveals that, though not *all* the time, the work was still *mostly* or *a lot of* the time about business. And in spite of what Emily said during the incident, the entire contexts surrounding it were based on sales and business. It seems that despite an interest on the how her work resembled a way for her to "contribute back to society" (excerpt 5), 'business' was inherently embedded in much of what she did. Emily's rationale for why she said what she said to her physician in excerpt 4 seems to support this interpretation of the story in excerpt 3. If her earlier evaluation of the story emphasised her *inclinations for meaningfulness*, her latter evaluation emphasised her need to build the business in order that she meet *work targets*.

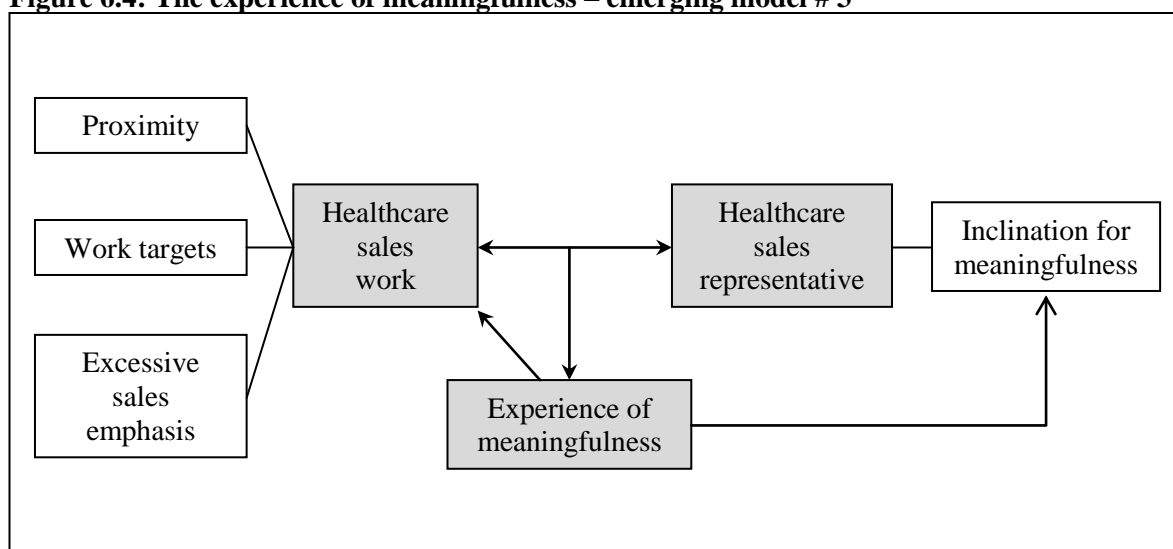
Notwithstanding the blurred boundaries between when it was about business and when it was not, the stories in excerpt 3 and 4 may be interpreted as depicting the significance of both aspects, i.e. the inclination for meaningfulness and the need to meet work targets, in shaping Emily's experience of meaningfulness. If so, this perhaps underscores the importance of the *interplay* between the aspects related to 'healthcare sales work' and the aspects connected to 'healthcare sales representatives' in the experience of meaningfulness in the workplace. This seems plausible since Emily's experience of meaningfulness in the workplace was storied as to be shaped by circumstances in and on the job rather than merely as something she imposed onto the job or as something that was naturally inherent in the job. Additionally, excerpts 3 and 4 possibly illustrate the tension in the interface

between one's spiritual inclinations and one's need to meet work targets, where compatibility and conflict coexists.

Thus far, the analysis of selected Emily's stories lends additional support to the emerging model of the experience of meaningfulness in the workplace. The brief story of Emily's experience in excerpt 5, however, possibly adds a new insight. At some point between her first and second jobs, Emily storied how she felt a yearning for deeper meaning in her work. The story perhaps alludes to Maslow's theory of the Hierarchy of Needs; how she began to seek the satisfaction of higher level needs once the lower level needs were satiated.

Be that as it may, the story also conveyed how the absence of meaningfulness possibly triggered a search for it. This interpretation seems plausible if we consider the way Emily depicted her third job, i.e. as the moment when she 'finally found the value she could add to her patients and doctors' (see excerpt 1). In a way, Emily's stories seem to centre on the narrative of how a greater contribution of work was sought and found. As such and in reference to the emerging model of the experience of meaningfulness (see Figure 6.3), it seems more plausible to connect 'Experience of meaningfulness', that is, including the absence of meaningfulness, to 'Inclination for meaningfulness'. Figure 6.4 illustrates the findings combined from this and the preceding analyses.

Figure 6.4: The experience of meaningfulness – emerging model # 3



Note: the dotted single-directional arrow depicting the tentative connection between 'Experience of meaningfulness' and 'Inclination for meaningfulness' in Figure 6.3 is replaced with a solid single-directional arrow.

6.1.1.4 Huang

Introduction

Huang is a 43 year-old lady who had spent her entire career, 19 years in total, as a medical devices sales representative in one healthcare sales company. She has only ever been in one team which promoted devices for minimally-invasive surgical procedures. Huang's job included assisting her surgeons during surgery and has recently been promoted to a sales manager's position, supervising three sales representatives. As a sales representative, she has met her sales target for 14 years in total, including the past six consecutive years.

Narrative

Huang's Christian faith seemed obvious from the interviews. Terms like 'prayer', 'blessed' and 'God' were commonly used to describe her work. Also, Huang likely viewed her work as a vocation since she took it as an opportunity to 'give back to God's good work', on top of providing for her family. In the first of the four excerpts, Huang storied how she saw God's role in her sales performance (see excerpt 1).

Excerpt 1

"[How have you been doing for the last few years?] I have been achieving for the last, mmm, six consecutive years. [Mmm. How, how do you think that happened?] I really have to give glory to Our Father in heaven because honestly, we can only do what we, you know, what we plan and all that, but things have a way of working out, you know. And obstacles can come unexpectedly. There's no way you can predict how anything will turn out. Mirac-, I've seen miracles, I tell you, year in year out, miracles have happened."

A while later, Huang illustrated her experience of a miracle with this story (see excerpt 2).

Excerpt 2

"There was this (*tender*), for my machine, my (Device A), and the end user wanted ours. The specs submitted was ours, right. But the head of department was approached by the competitor when they knew about it. Okay. Unknown to us, the head of department was about to convert, about to convert. So, when we, when we got news from the specialist, the second man, the specialist that 'hey, I think my boss is seeing the (Company Z) guy quite a bit, you know. I'm not sure your machine is really secure or not.' So, we started seeing him, but he denied. 'No, I submitted your thing, your specs' and all that, okay, he assured us. But it was a decoy. To that extent he went. It was a decoy specs when he actually submitted my competitor's specs for the final thing. Okay. So, when my (local agent) got the thing, for invitation for (*tender*), it was all my competitor's specs. [Mmm. So, what happened then?] So, we still participated, alright, but the heart was sinking. Okay. Still participated. And then the closing date came and went, and I got a call from my good friend, my competitor. In a panicky voice he said, 'Did you know the

(*tender*) of this machine for (State 1) hospital, (specialist A) department?' I said 'Yes'. He asked 'did you participate?' I said 'Yes, why?' He didn't know the closing date. He didn't even know the closing date and he missed it. We were the only one that participated. [Wow.] Can you imagine? So, this sort of thing. How do you, what do you call it? (^laughs^) What do you call it? (.) (.) [Nothing sort of a miracle, basically right?] Exactly, exactly."

However, her stories did not only depict her sales to have been delivered to her miraculously without any effort on her part. She described the business as intensely competitive and she had strategies in place to address the pressures to deliver her sales targets. One of these strategies was made clear when Huang recounted the advice she gave to her teammates on how to manage their sales activities in a monthly sales cycle.

Excerpt 3

"Ah, mmm, to make it simpler for my teammates, I'll say 'just focus the first two weeks' because otherwise, what upper management will do is that, week one, we're only how many per cent of our thing. That means right from week one, just after closing, we're already pressured by numbers you know. (^Tsk^) and, I don't know how they take it, but I find it meaningless to be kept on reminded of numbers. Then you lose the very essence of why you're doing this in the first place. So I'll want them to have a balance of, of the other part of it, that you're doing meaningful work, which you find joy in this part of it, that you're doing good for the community (...reiterates the same points she just made...) promote new products, see new customers, or tell the current customers about new product, or upgrading them, whatever, go in for cases. Do what you should be doing. Okay, don't get pressured with the number thing, for the first two weeks. Come week three, that's when you should start dropping all these things already, the processes, and go into the numbers already, numbers portion of it. See what, what are the things not come in yet, check on the viability of it, whether it's still good, going to come in, how solid is it? If it's not, look for backup plan, that's the numbers part of it."

Huang also seemed to have actively sought ways to remind herself of the meaningfulness of her job (see excerpt 4).

Excerpt 4

"Let's say if I am attending a case, (.) I'm telling myself that that is someone's Mom, or someone's, you know, lying there you know. So, I sometimes, it can be draggy to be in a surgery for many hours in a cold environment, mmm, I feel that, you know, my time there is well spent because I'm helping the doctor use the device properly, on someone's mother, so that, although that face is hidden, we could, if you go to the other side, the anaesthetist side of it, you could see [Do you do that? I mean do you -] Sometimes I do. [Why do you go and see the face?] I mean it just brings that part, you know, it just, to remind myself of why I am here in this case. Why am I spending this, many hours here because you can lose yourself in the monotony of things if you allow yourself to. You can get lost in the, you know, it's just another case, 'can you get on with using the device so that I can get out of here'."

Analysis

In the interviews, Huang responded with many stories of her work. She freely and occasionally, with only minimal prompting, told elaborate stories of experiences and events to illustrate what she wanted to convey. As such, it was possible that the narrative interviewing technique facilitated to a considerable extent the way Huang naturally engages in talk.

Excerpts 1 and 2 show how and why Huang credited her success to God. While the incident in excerpt 2 could have been interpreted in many other ways, such as the result of incompetent competition, her diligence in spite of the odds or simply luck – which might not have been unusual owing to her long working history – Huang cast the incident instead as a miracle. It was miraculous in a sense that she won the tender despite the many odds stacked against her. However, it seems likely that the way she regarded the incident reflected her faith and its relevance in her life at work rather than the event itself and how it turned in her favour. If so, the story shows how values, faith beliefs particularly, were imported to give meaning to events and experiences of work.

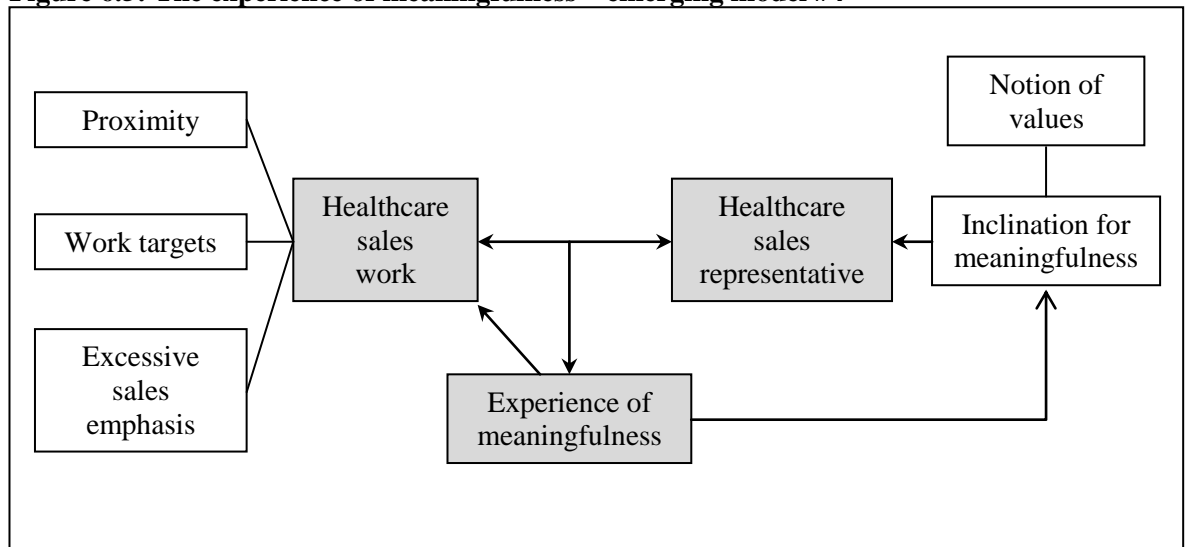
Nevertheless, there were other facets to her stories about work other than these miraculous moments. In excerpt 3, Huang described her work as having two contrasting features – the “meaningful” part and the “less meaningful” or “numbers” part. There are perhaps two things we can infer from the story in excerpt 3. Firstly, Huang associated the promotional work healthcare sales representatives were expected to engage in as the “meaningful part”, clearly indicating that the experience of meaningfulness can be fostered therein. Secondly, she seemed to recognise that an excessive focus on numbers was likely to stifle the potential meaningfulness of the job and that it was imperative to avoid stressing on sales the entire month. In short, these two things possibly relate to the aspects of, and the interplay between, ‘inclination for meaningfulness’, ‘work targets’ and ‘excessive sales emphasis’ in shaping the experience of meaningfulness (see Figure 6.4).

But the story in excerpt 3, when analysed in tandem with the story in excerpt 4, gives rise to another possible narrative. In excerpt 3, Huang storied how she strategized to redress a perceived imbalance, that is, to accommodate meaningfulness in a largely sales-driven work environment, which by association, was less meaningful to her. The story in excerpt 4 was but another way she strategized her work to accommodate the kinds of meaning she seemingly wanted out of what she did at work. These two stories could have depicted the

possibility of the experience of meaningfulness shaping one's work and the proactive ways Huang sought to shape her experience of meaningfulness in her work. Both interpretations seem consistent with the larger narrative of Huang's stories, that is, her pursuance of work as her vocation.

The analysis from this selection of Huang's stories and the preceding three participants are combined and depicted in Figure 6.5.

Figure 6.5: The experience of meaningfulness – emerging model #4



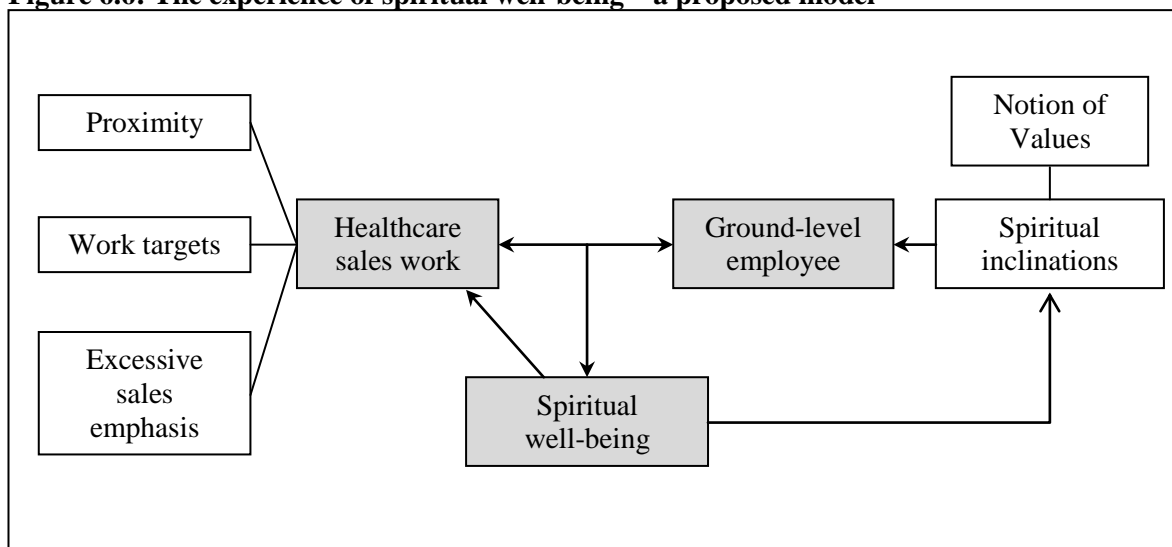
The additional findings from Huang's stories are represented by: (1) the aspect of the 'notion of values', which partly defines what spirituality in the workplace may be (see section 2.1.4) and is seen as connected to 'Inclination for meaningfulness', and (2) the single-directional arrow from 'Inclination or meaningfulness' to 'Healthcare sales representative', depicting the proactive ways Huang sought to shape her experience of meaningfulness in her work.

6.2 Findings

This chapter's analysis focused on the ways participants may have engaged with their work and the ways in which this engagement facilitated their experience of meaningfulness. An

outcome of the analysis is a proposed model of the experience of meaningfulness among ground-level employees (see Figure 6.6).

Figure 6.6: The experience of spiritual well-being – a proposed model



The central finding from the preceding analysis is that the experience of meaningfulness in the workplace was potentially constructed. Because the notion of meaning is likely a central notion of spirituality in the workplace and that it is closely connected to and defines the other notions such as authenticity, connection, values and growth (see sections 2.1 and 2.2, and the analyses of the participants stories in Chapters 5 and 6²⁸), there is good reason to infer that spiritual well-being or the experience of it may also be constructed.

However, the discourse within the research area tells a different story. For instance, some studies give the impression that employees are able to *find* spirituality at work, in which case spirituality is perceived to be supplied by work. Additionally, the discourse within the area on occasions also conceive that employees are able to *bring* spirituality to work, in which case spirituality is assumed to be supplied by the employee. Here are some examples cited from extant literature that illustrate this point [emphasis added]:

“Both theories are based on concepts that can help individuals *find* meaning and purpose in their lives and provide a new level of spirituality.” (King and Nicol, 1999, p.241)

²⁸ The following notions of spirituality in the workplace was evident in the analyses of the following participants: the notion of authenticity in Loh, the notion of connection in Loh and Chong, the notion of values in Lim, Yong and Huang, and the notion of growth in Emily.

“If this is present, then chances are that individuals will *find* meaning in their work which will ultimately enrich both themselves and the organization.” (Harrington et al., 2001, p.159)

“Workers who are able to *express* their spirituality through their work find work more satisfying.” (Reave, 2005, p. 666)

“This means that employees cannot *bring* their full spiritual selves to a workplace that does not support them.” (Moore and Casper, 2006, p. 111)

“But while the workplace can provide the space and support for spiritual interconnectedness, only the individual can *bring* their own spirituality to the workplace” (Chalofsky, 2003, p. 77)

Based on this chapter’s analysis, the assumptions embedded in the above excerpts, though not wrong, may only be accurate up to a point. This is because the analyses show that the meaningfulness and spiritual well-being may not just be what one brings to work or merely what one finds at work. As an experience, spiritual well-being was likely the result of the *interplay* between potential and possible spiritual inclinations of the employee and what was permitted by work, its contexts and features. That is, spiritual well-being was *constructed* while employees engaged with their work.

That spiritual well-being may be constructed seems plausible because the participants selected for the analysis in this chapter, except in one case i.e. Chong, did not seem to have expressed any ‘calling’ towards healthcare sales when they first joined the industry. They did not seem to have selected their jobs based on wanting to make a difference or to seek a larger purpose. Yet, the inclination for meaningfulness seems central in their stories of work eventually. And even if participants were called to healthcare sales, the ideas behind the calling could be viewed as a precursor form of meaningfulness since the ideas seemed either vague or only broadly conceived. Thus, the meaningfulness the participants eventually storied was unlikely to have been conceived before they engaged with their work, at least not conceived in full.

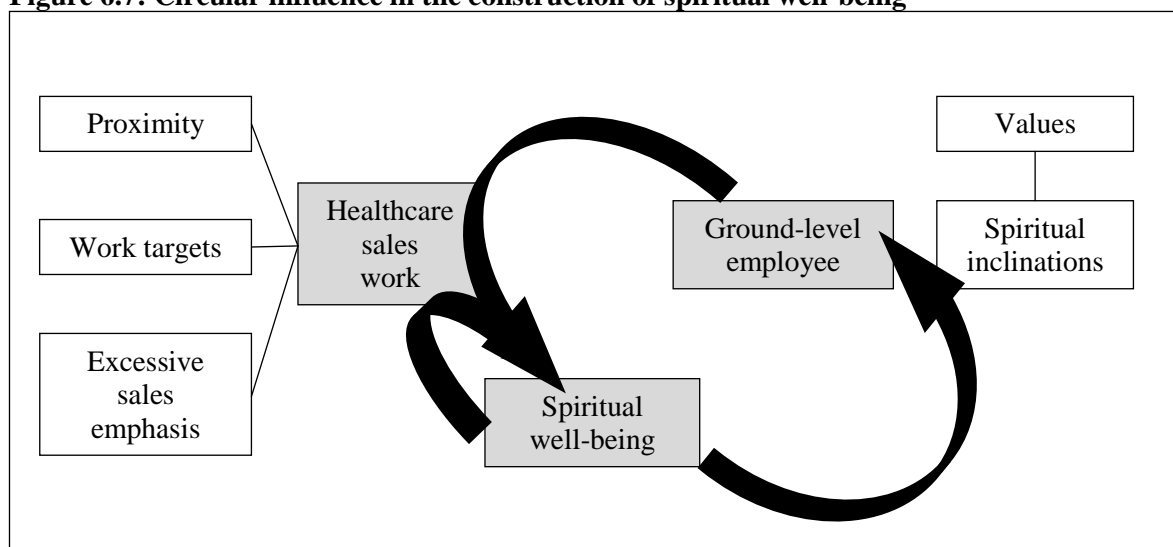
That spiritual well-being may be an experience constructed in the interplay between the employee’s spiritual inclinations and his or her work suggests that the experience was realised from a significant engagement with work. It was in and through work that the experience of meaningfulness was birthed. Hence, the context within which the experience of spiritual well-being is to be constructed assumes equal importance as the employee’s spiritual inclinations. This finding perhaps helps research in the area appreciate the nuance of what is meant by the ‘alignment between one’s actions at work with one’s values and

beliefs' or what it means to live an integrated life at work (see Pfeffer, 2003). Alignment and integration are likely to include substantial aspects of the employee's work as opposed to merely conjuring up meaning and imposing it onto the work. This seems to echo Lips-Wiersma and Morris' (2009) view that material reality may be just as important as well as closely associated with spiritual ideals in uncovering meaningfulness at work.

Additionally, the prospect of spiritual well-being constructed in the interplay between the employee and his or her work brings to light the contingent nature of the experience. This means that the extent of authenticity, meaning, connection, values and growth experienced at work, provided employees are inclined spiritually, are possibly dependent on what is possible within the circumstances in which the experience is conceived. As such, the issue this finding raises is the need to recognise the possibilities and limitations to the experience of spiritual well-being workplace, on what can or cannot be constructed by the spiritually-inclined employee at work.

The analyses also show that spiritual well-being, as a constructed experience, is possibly an *on-going process*. This finding seems to be supported by the directional influence depicted by the arrows in the proposed model of the experience of spiritual well-being (see Figure 6.1). The model depicts two circular influences, one between 'Spiritual inclinations' and 'Spiritual well-being', via 'Ground-level employee' and 'Healthcare sales work' and the other between 'Spiritual well-being' and 'Healthcare sales work'. This observation is depicted in Figure 6.7.

Figure 6.7: Circular influence in the construction of spiritual well-being



As such, the experience of spiritual well-being could be more accurately described as a continuous evolving process, never arriving or final. A perceptible way the experience of spiritual well-being could stagnate is when the two critical domains in the construction of spiritual well-being, i.e. the employee (his or her spiritual inclinations) and the employee's work stagnates or declines in significance. If these do not stagnate or decline in significance, then the suggested continuous construction of spiritual well-being could perhaps lead to (1) the re-visioning of the experience of spiritual well-being, of authenticity, meaning, connection, values and growth, and (2) the re-visioning of work for the employee.

While all these may be seen as merely reflecting the constructionist epistemological stance adopted in the research, the findings importantly sheds light on the possible ways spiritual well-being may be constructed. For instance, while *work targets*, *proximity* and *excessive sales emphasis* were identified as aspects within the domain of the healthcare sales work possibly involved in the construction of meaningfulness, they reveal three additional insights:

- (1) Aspects of work are, in themselves, not necessarily more or less meaningful or spiritual; they are what the employee has access to in order to shape work to reflect his or her spiritual inclinations,
- (2) Some aspects of work are more amenable to the construction of the experience of spiritual well-being while other aspects may suppress the possibility of experiencing spiritual well-being, and
- (3) While aspects of work may provide options for the kinds of spiritual experiences that are possible for the employee, they simultaneously also set limits. In a sense, aspects of work dictate the extent to which the experience of spiritual well-being is realisable.

It may appear as if the larger societal influence on the experience of spiritual well-being in the workplace is not considered by the proposed model and in this discussion. Though it was not the focus of this research, there is sufficient reason to assume that social influences play a part in the construction of the experience of spiritual well-being. This can be evidenced by the generic ways participants related their work to be either about helping

patients, making a difference or contributing to others, which possibly are reflections of the social values typically associated with healthcare. Nonetheless, it was in the distinct and precise meanings of the work the participants storied that alluded to the significance of the individual-level construction of the experience of meaningfulness; these were the tangible experiences the participants' stories were largely made up of.

Within the domain of the healthcare sales representative, *inclinations for meaningfulness*, *values* and the *proactive search for meaningfulness* at work were identified as aspects that played a significant role in the construction of meaningfulness. This may be somewhat expected since the model was built on the stories of selected participants who were perhaps more inclined spiritually. Aside from what has been raised about these aspects in the preceding analysis, the findings about the domain of the employee and his or her inclinations in the construction of meaningfulness in the workplace perhaps exhibit two possible characteristic of the employee's spiritual inclinations.

The first characteristic is what may be termed as *spiritual agency*. Employees who are inclined spiritually may likely exercise control over their experience of authenticity, meaning, connection, values and growth in the workplace. This is perhaps especially obvious from the way work was shaped by participants to reflect their inclinations for meaningfulness. The second characteristic is *spiritual resilience*, which reflects how meaningfulness may be constructed in an environment that does not necessarily accommodate or emphasise such meaning, or that stifles it. *Spiritual agency* and *spiritual resilience* were perhaps apparent when participants switched jobs when meaningfulness could not be constructed in one place of work or when they sought to re-enact in their work moments when meaningfulness was previously experienced.

What is perhaps remarkable is that *spiritual agency*, *spiritual resilience* and the circular influence in the construction of spiritual well-being are characteristics that were exhibited, not in opposition of, but in compliance with the features and contexts of work, including ones that may have been impeded them. This helps explain why, if participants are inclined to a considerable extent, they generally story a compatible interface between their inclinations for meaningfulness and work targets. The *on-going process* of constructing spiritual well-being among spiritually-inclined employees possibly ensures that they can construct meaningfulness in the workplace that reflects both their core responsibilities at work and their spiritual inclinations.

However, this finding is perhaps not wholly surprising since the stories originated from employees who were, firstly, inclined spiritually to a considerable extent, and secondly, consistently performing at work. These were participants who perhaps, either from the very beginning or in due course, found a way to reconcile their spiritual inclinations with their work. In fact, this raises questions over the extent to which compromises may have needed to be made by employees in order to accommodate their spiritual inclinations while at work, particularly if work or some aspects of it did not foster, accommodate or alternatively stifled experiences of spiritual well-being. It is in this line of reasoning that Whyte's (2002) argument²⁹ may be invoked, that the 'organization man' has come to deify work and the organisation within which work is enacted. In light of this research's findings, Whyte's (2002) argument perhaps may be a useful perspective to pursue for future research in the area.

But what seemed more significant from the analyses is not whether the participants needed to reconcile their spiritual inclinations with their work. The matter of having to compromise dissipates if the idea was to be able to construct an experience of work that resonated with their spiritual inclinations, not impose their 'fully conceived' spiritual inclinations onto their work. That the experience of spiritual well-being may likely be constructed perhaps even suggests some degree of negotiation, reconciliation or compromise on the part of the employee. All this, of course, also means that there ought to be aspects of work that are amenable to the construction of experiences of spiritual well-being that resonate with the employee's spiritual inclinations in the first place.

6.3 Concluding remarks

In sum, these are the findings: spiritual well-being, as an experience, is likely to be constructed while one engages with one's work. The construction of the experience is also likely to be *an-going process* and contingent upon the possibilities and limitations inherent in the work viewed in light of the employee's spiritual inclinations. *Spiritual agency* and *spiritual resilience* are likely characteristics of spiritually-inclined employees, which can coexist with similar agency and resilience towards achieving their work objectives, if they are so inclined.

²⁹ Whyte's (2002) book, originally published in 1956, refers specifically to the American workforce of the mid-1900s. His arguments possibly apply to some of this research's participants and their approach to work.

Chapter 7 Contribution and conclusion

Following the analysis and findings in Chapters 5 and 6, this chapter closes this thesis by first reminding the reader about the research purpose and research questions. After that, the chapter is organised into four sections. The first section relates to the limitations of the research and its findings. In the second section, I present the research's contributions to knowledge and expand on them by illustrating how the findings inform selected extant theoretical arguments. The third and fourth sections examine the possible implications the findings have for research and practice respectively. Recommendations for future research are embedded in the second, third and fourth sections. After that, I conclude by summarising the research.

The purposes of this research were to: (1) understand the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance, and (2) examine the interface between the inclination for meaningfulness and the need to meet work targets. In pursuance of these two research purposes, I examined the stories ground-level who demonstrate consistent work performance tell about their work and the significance of spiritual inclinations and spiritual well-being therein. This research's corresponding central research questions with regard to the ground-level employee's experience were: (1) what is the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance? and (2) how does the inclination for meaningfulness interface with the need to meet work targets?

7.1 Limitations

Several aspects need to be taken into account when considering this research's findings. Firstly, the findings may only be immediately relevant to the segment of the working population whose spiritual inclinations (and disinclinations) in the workplace and contextual aspects of work mirror the participants' inclinations and work contexts. Though we can speculate, it may not be immediately evident the extent to which 'spiritual' and 'material' aspects of healthcare sales work and the processes observed therein among this research's participants feature in employees in other settings, such as in other industries or in other cultures.

This limitation is to be expected since qualitative research typically employs purposeful sampling and its broad aims are the generation of empirical evidence for *theoretical* generalisations rather than *empirical* generalisations (see section 4.1 and Gobo, 2004). This research sought the experiences of employees that would enable a much deeper understanding of the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance. And in aid of theoretical generalisability, I have attempted to be as explicit as I can about the entire research process. Hence, the issue of small sampling size and the lack of generalisability of this research's findings to other (demographically-similar) group of employees were of a lesser significance for this research at the outset.

Secondly, this research was conducted on employees from a single industry in a single Asian country. As such, the contextual aspects of the findings need to be considered. Future research with similar conceptual frameworks conducted on other settings will further inform research in the area. Nonetheless, the choice to select participants from a single industry enabled this research to better understand the influence of the contexts of work on the participants' experience of work. It is also perhaps pertinent to note that sales representatives in this research were selected only from multinational healthcare sales companies in Malaysia. As such, the contexts of work for this research's participant cohort may differ from entrepreneurial and local (Malaysian) healthcare sales companies. Findings and conclusions from this research ought to be taken with sufficient caution for these differences.

Thirdly, the research findings were based on a single method of inquiry, that is, narrative interviewing. The collection of data from more than a single source or the triangulation of method of research generally helps systematically validate findings (Creswell and Miller, 2000; Miles and Huberman, 1994). Nonetheless, the issue of triangulation of method did not arise since this research was not seeking a single truth but the truth of the participants' experiences. The research sought verisimilitude of the participants' stories of work and not merely factual evidence (see section 4.1). Furthermore, eliciting stories of work from participants was deemed as the only viable way for this research, given the time and resource, to gain insights into their spiritually-related experiences in the workplace.

Despite these limitations, this research was able to gain insights into the experiences of participants that shed light onto the research questions. The sales representatives from the healthcare sales industry in Malaysia was a useful site to examine the relation between

spiritual well-being and work performance while narrative interviewing provided this research with a suitable method to gain sufficient access to a rich collection of experiences of work relevant to this research.

7.2 Contribution to knowledge

Despite not being immediately applicable to other segments of the working population, this research's findings *are* theoretically generalisable (see Section 7.1) to employees who deem the spiritual and material intersect in their work or to work settings where the interface between the spiritual and the material can be encountered. This can perhaps be observed among employees in academia, healthcare, social work and in public services since (1) these work settings, arguably more readily than others, facilitate the employees' spiritual inclinations or spiritual well-being, and (2) the need to meet work targets are presumably also prevalent in these work settings. In this sense, this research's contribution to knowledge can be wide-ranging.

This section begins with an explicit discussion of the research findings and the general ways these contribute to knowledge or fill the knowledge gaps identified from the synthesis of the literature. Thus, the first part of this section also serves to provide a summary of the research findings for the reader. In the latter part of this section, the research's contributions to knowledge are conveyed by way of relating its findings to relevant studies in the area.

This research contributes to current knowledge in the area in several ways. Firstly, this research investigated success and excellence rather than mediocrity and failure. Its inquiry is thus appreciative in nature in that it sought to generate knowledge and contribute to a discourse of possibilities (i.e. why and how people succeed) as opposed to focusing on the deficit and *impossibilities* (i.e. why and how people do not succeed). As Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) argue, the former approach rather than the latter is a better option if research intends to tap into the creative and generative powers of our minds in order to facilitate positive social change.

Secondly, the findings were developed from an investigation into the experiences of ground-level employees. Supplementing current studies with the ground-level employee's

voice on the matter helps restore balance to the general trend in the literature privileging the leaders' perspectives and the tendency to view ideas surrounding spiritual well-being purely as a means for organisational gain. This research thus provides additional, alternative and necessary perspectives on the subject matter, ones that critique and supplement current knowledge at the same time.

Thirdly, this research investigated the interface instead of merely the alignment between employees and their work. As such, the research adopted a stance that enabled it to examine the experiences of spiritual inclinations above and beyond ones that merely affirm the organisation's interests or that of its leaders. In this way also, it opened up its investigation onto the possible negative manifestations of spiritual well-being, what may currently be an empirically under-researched aspect of research in the area.

As a result, what the findings show is the diverse ways the ground-level employee's spiritual inclinations interface with work and the equally diverse ways spiritual well-being relates to work performance (see section 5.6). Specifically, the experiences of the interface for ground-level employees can range from compatible to incompatible to absent while the relations between spiritual well-being and work performance could either be positive, negative or insignificant. Furthermore, the different types of interfaces and relations between spiritual well-being and work performance can occur simultaneously as well as can, at times, be observed across and within the participants' respective jobs.

This diversity challenges the discourse in the area which perpetuates the argument that increased work performance may be an outcome of aligning the employee and his or her work. This theoretical argument does not fully reflect the research findings because: (1) alignment (or the compatible interface) is not always associated with an increase in work performance; (2) there are other criteria (see section 5.6) that need to be met before a positive relation between spiritual well-being and work performance can be claimed, criteria which are usually not considered in related studies; (3) the experience of the interface and the influence of spiritual well-being on work performance are not static nor are they permanent; and (4) more importantly, 'alignment' was not achieved by way of what organisations or leaders *do* to employees.

Moreover, the diversity foregrounds the multidimensional quality, i.e. gradation, subtleties and inconsistencies, of the employee's experience which renders direct 'cause and effect'

arguments regarding the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance less compelling. In some ways, it in fact invalidates the premise existing quantitative research rely on to examine concepts of spiritual well-being and work performance.

This diversity is also why the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance, if positive, was found to be fragile and transient (see section 5.6). And because this may also apply to circumstances where spiritual well-being were negatively or insignificantly related to work performance, the finding foreshadows the fragile, transient, and hence mutable nature of the relation rather than whether the relation is positive, negative or insignificant. Thus, this research's findings cast serious doubts on the overly simplistic arguments in the literature which emphasise the purportedly achievable, and thereafter, immutable and unidimensional way spiritual well-being is positively related to work performance.

Fourthly, this research investigated the locally-situated and contextual accounts of the ground-level employee's experience of work. This research focus contributed further to understanding the experience of spiritual well-being, and by extension, its relation to work performance. Much of the empirical studies in the area rarely do so or do so only cursorily, thereby deemphasising the influence of the domain of work on the experience. This research is able to demonstrate spiritual well-being as a constructed experience. As such, spiritual well-being is neither simply a factor of the employee's nor the organisation's spiritual stance. Rather, the experience ought to derive realistically from the employee's experience of work; it is the testing of one's spiritual ideals with what may be practically possible in one's work. In broader contexts, the findings accentuate the *individualised* experience of spiritual well-being.

On one hand, the finding that spiritual well-being is a constructed experience conveys the co-dependent nature and the on-going process of attempts by employees to live integrated lives at work. From the perspective of spiritually-inclined ground-level employees who demonstrate consistent and good work performance, the emphasis is on the extents to which their work responsibilities and their spiritual inclinations can be fulfilled or constructed in tandem. In a sense, the process for these employees may be one of negotiation, reconciliation and perhaps compromise between what s/he is spiritually inclined towards and the numerous possibilities accorded by his or her work, which are also by no means immutable.

On the other hand, the prospect of spiritual well-being as a constructed experience brings to light the boundaries that are imposed on the experience. The findings show that some aspects of work will be more amenable to be constructed by the employee to reflect his or her spiritual inclinations while other aspects of work may markedly restrict its construction. If employees are thus inclined, and just like some of the healthcare sales representatives in this study, there may be parts of their work that can help facilitate spiritual well-being while parts of their work can instead stifle the experience.

Two examples help illustrate how the excessive emphasis on prescribed targets, for instance, could overshadow work that may potentially be amenable to be constructed as spiritually-meaningful. The first example relates to an issue that arose in a National Health Service (NHS) hospital in the United Kingdom. According to a British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) News report in December 2013, staff at Colchester Hospital were pressured to manipulate patient appointments so that “performance figures would look better” (Barton, 2013). As a result of such manipulations, patients whose waiting time had already breached institutionally-prescribed targets ended up waiting longer. This may have had negative health implications for the affected patients. It was reported that staff at the hospital reportedly felt the directives were neither right nor fair to patients.

The second example relates to the field of academia in Malaysia. The news portal, The Malaysian Insider, reported about the imposition of publishing targets on academics in some Malaysian universities and the increasing trend of paying to publish at predatory and low-quality journals (Gomez, 2015). Instead of improving its core functions of research and teaching, the news report explains, academics are subjected to these narrow targets that encourage ethically questionable activities (Gomez, 2015). These two examples illustrate how institutionally-prescribed targets have the potential to compel employees to shift their focus away from work which can facilitate the experience of spiritual well-being, as might be generally assumed from social values believed to be attached to education- and healthcare-related jobs.

So, while there may be contexts and features of work that offer a wide enough range of possible meanings and wide enough range of ways where the employee can construct the meaningfulness of work s/he may be more inclined towards, it is also important to consider the influences of contexts and features of work that stifle or are antagonistic towards the construction of spiritual well-being. In a way and extending the analogy of work in the

healthcare sales industry, we have to assess jobs for the ‘health’ part and the ‘sales’ part. This is also true irrespective of the organisation’s profit status since, as Mitroff and Denton (1999a) argue, “(m)any nonprofits have specific political goals and are even more concerned with obtaining hard results in the secular world than many for-profit companies” (p.88).

This research’s contribution to knowledge can be illustrated further by conveying how the findings are linked to the work of Wrzesniewski et al. (2013), Driver (2007) and Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009). They are selected for examination since these authors all raise ideas that allude to spiritual well-being as a constructed experience. Also, the latter two studies contain elaborate critique, pertaining largely to the hegemonic, instrumental and exploitative stance implicit or explicit in spirituality in the workplace research that, in part, prompted this research to examine the voices of ground-level employees. I discuss each of them in turn in the following paragraphs.

Wrzesniewski et al.’s (2013) work, situated in positive organisational scholarship³⁰, relates specifically to meaningful work. The authors suggest that ‘job crafting’, which is described as the act of redrawing the boundaries of one’s job (task, relational and cognitive), assists employees in creating meaningful work. They further posit that the design of one’s job, from a job crafting perspective, is “a starting place – or partially blank canvas – from which employees can alter the content of their jobs in ways that cultivate a positive sense of meaning and identity in their work” (Wrzesniewski et al., 2013, p.287). The assumptions Wrzesniewski et al. (2013) thus make is that employees are fully responsible for and have the authority to alter the contents of their jobs.

While this research accepts the premise of Wrzesniewski et al.’s (2013) argument, job crafting nonetheless does not fully reflect the construction process of spiritual well-being. As the authors presciently identify, the job is a ‘partially blank canvas’. It is crucial to take heed of the partially filled part of the canvas because that is what employees have to engage with to construct what will become their experience of spiritual well-being. Also, what the idea of job crafting seem less cognizant of are: (1) the existence of less meaningful work inherent in the job and their influences therein, and (2) the unalterable aspects of one’s job, for instance, specifically prescribed tasks related to individual, team

³⁰ According to Cameron and McNaughtan (2014), positive organizational scholarship “was developed to investigate the positive outcomes, practices, attributes, and changes that occur in organizations and their members” (p.447) and “aims to reveal positive capabilities and activities that lead to flourishing in organizations” (p. 447)

or organisational performance indices, and the ways these may interfere with what employees may be more inclined to craft their work to be.

It is likely that the core functions of one's job represent a dominant influence on the meaning one may ascribe to the job. As such, being able to redraw the boundaries of such core responsibilities or work targets offers the highest potential for employees to shape work to reflect their inclination for meaningfulness or spiritual well-being in the workplace. But these are precisely the aspects of work that can severely stifle the construction of spiritual well-being, core functions which ground-level employees have very little control over and are expected to fulfil. Additionally, the meeting of these core responsibilities governs their career trajectories, including the possible loss of employment. These are perhaps the issues that need to be addressed as research assesses the influence of spiritual well-being on work performance.

Driver's (2007) position is similar to Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2013) in its intent to empower the individual. Driver (2007) suggests there is a need for research in the area to resist seeing meaning as prescribed by organisations or programmed by them since the perspective interferes with "the uncovering of meaning by individuals" (p.70). The study of spirituality in the workplace based largely on prescription and instrumental purposes may, as Driver (2007) claims, renders meaning-making meaningless. In a way, this position recognises the individual employee's role and agency in constructing spiritual well-being as opposed to 'it' being found at work or brought to work.

However, Driver (2007) recommends that researchers adopt "alternative research paradigms that enable the study of *non-material, non-controlled and freely unfolding meaning making*" (p.70) [emphasis added]. This recommendation misses the central point that spiritual well-being is likely an experience constructed from the interplay between the employee (his or her spiritual inclinations) *and* the materially-dependent as well as the institutionally-governed nature of work. Rather than freeing oneself of all constraints, this research suggests that there is a need to precisely consider organisational realities, the kinds of work one does including important matters related to financial and other organisational performance indices, with respect to how meaningfulness and spiritual well-being may be experienced. If we accept that meaning-making should be studied in how it freely unfolds, even if that is possible, then researchers end up accessing an ideal rather

than an experienced reality, a spirituality that is disembodied from the very contexts that help shape the experience of it.

However, organisations, as Driver (2007) suggests, tend to “prescribe meaning for its members (and that) individuals in organizations have been socialized to accept such meaning making” (p.68). In this case, instead of ignoring the prospect of the imposition of meaning within organisations, which perhaps is impractical to do, proponents of spirituality in the workplace ought to embrace the concept as a process of critical engagement with one’s contexts (see Robinson and Smith, 2014), including such possible impositions as they exist for the employee. Only then will research and practice in the area reflect the reality of the employee’s experience in full.

Not unlike Driver (2007), Lips-Wiersma and Morris’ (2009) empirical study also reveal that meaning should not be imposed or prescribed by the organisation. More pertinently, Lips-Wiersma and Morris’ (2009) conclude that: (1) spiritual “ideals are unrealistic when not tested against reality” (p.507), and (2) instead of ignoring the aspects of work that contradicts their spiritual ideals, participants needed to come to terms with non-ideal work circumstances, if not reconcile them. Additionally, the authors describe the interaction between spiritual ideals and reality as “the very context in which we have to create and fulfil our purposes” (p.508), what might be interpreted as an allusion to the interplay between the employee, his or her spiritual inclinations, and work in the construction of meaningfulness and spiritual well-being at work.

The combination of Lips-Wiersma and Morris’ (2009) and Driver’s (2007) findings raise two important points. The first is that the inherent tension between spiritual ideals and reality (Lips-Wiersma and Morris, 2009) and the need to empower individual employees. Driver (2007) suggests that it is necessary to give ample opportunities for spiritually-inclined employees to engage in the process of constructing the experience of spiritual well-being. This, the findings suggest, gives employees the chance to develop their natural disposition for spiritual agency and spiritual resilience. This is perhaps why Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009) and Driver (2007) come to the conclusion that meaning should not be supplied by the organisation since that would rob the employee of the chance to construct, personalise and own the experience.

The second point is that because of the tension between the ideal and reality, the process of constructing spiritual well-being will be difficult and disconcerting to some extent for the employee. In fact, spirituality, according to Mitroff and Denton (1999a), “profoundly unsettles” (p. xix). Nevertheless, the authors surmise that “(t)he purpose of this unsettling is to spur us on constantly to improve the human condition” (p. xix). Frankl (2004) expresses a similar opinion when he says “(t)o be sure, man’s search for meaning may arouse inner tension rather than inner equilibrium. However, precisely such tension is an indispensable prerequisite of mental health” (p. 109). In a sense, the anxieties and problems that the employee faces while attempting to craft his or her experience of spiritual well-being should not be eliminated but seen as vital to sustain their aspiration for such experiences.

Finally, spiritual well-being among ground-level employees should not be perceived to be universal nor necessary for enhanced work performance. This is reminiscent of Maslow's (1998) theories on self-actualization and the hierarchy of needs, which were developed from his insights of people who were fairly ‘healthy’ working in a fairly ‘healthy’ context. Hence, Maslow’s theories do not have universally application. In fact, Maslow (1998) cautions that “people who are fixated at the safety-need level” (p.43) ought to be managed using different principles. This is not so much a contribution to knowledge as it is a reminder of individual differences with regard to spiritual inclinations among employees.

7.3 Implications for research

The implications of this research’s findings are fundamentally epistemological in nature and as such are essentially broad-ranging. Firstly, the findings indicate that using positivist methods to investigate spirituality-related experiences in the workplace may be misdirected in some key respects. In support of critique against the use of survey-statistical methods of inquiry, this research provides clear empirical evidence for the need to consider individual and contextual nuances that shape the experience. While purportedly able to portray trends using large numbers of participants, survey-statistical analyses average out the many aspects that are critical to understanding the experience, such as the varied ways work is experienced by the individual employee. With the prospect of spiritual well-being as a constructed experience, surveys collected for statistical analysis are arguably inadequate as a sophisticated enough tool to capture the dynamic quality of the experience, that is,

notions that in many ways are “highly subjective and fluid and often idiosyncratic” (Ashforth and Pratt, 2010, p. 45).

Additionally and relatedly, the contextual, contingent and evolving nature of the spiritual well-being experience frustrates the neat and parsimoniously-driven approach of quantitative studies. This can lead to spurious conclusions. Case in point is when studies (see for e.g. Fry et al., 2011; Milliman et al., 2003; Rego and Cunha, 2008; Sengupta, 2010) extrapolate their understanding of the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance based primarily on statistical correlations between them. What this research found was that there are instances where spiritual well-being has no consequential relations to work performance despite their simultaneous occurrences among sampled participants.

Secondly, there is a need for perspectives and models of research that account for the construction of the experience of spiritual well-being. More often than not, studies emphasise the experience within the individual to the exclusion of influences outside the individual. For instance, Conklin (2012) cites a considerable amount of literature which seem preoccupied with “the centrality of the self in the pursuit of calling...how calling manifests over one’s life” (p.299) at work. Not only do such models of research demonstrate a lack of consideration for the reverse influence, that is, of work on one’s calling, they perpetuate the perspective that the experience of calling or spiritual well-being at work is the outcome of a unidirectional process, neatly and fully conceived by oneself and imposed unproblematically in the domain of work. Based on this research’s findings, what Conklin (2012) assumes about the concept of calling or spiritual well-being at work may be too simplistic.

Case and Gosling’s (2010) suggestions are pertinent to this research’s findings albeit not in the way the authors may have conceived them. After providing a critique of spirituality in the workplace scholarship and practice that seek to “reinforce and satisfy the appetites of extant capitalist discourse” (p.261), Case and Gosling (2010) suggest that there could be three alternative ways of conceptualising spirituality in the workplace: (1) that the employee’s spirituality is subjected to “organized manipulation” (p.274) for corporate ends, (2) that employees view work as an avenue for fulfilling their spiritual needs, and (3) that spirituality and the workplace are not befitting for each other, that they have “incommensurate ends, neither bearing any essential relation to each other” (p.275).

From the perspective of the constructed nature of spiritual well-being, all three perspectives ought to be accommodated. That while work (or work targets) shapes the employee's experience of spiritual well-being (the first way), it can nevertheless be an important domain for some employees to fulfil their spiritual inclinations (the second way). And despite aspects of work that may not readily commensurate with their spiritual inclinations (the third way), employees, if they are inclined spiritually, tend to search for jobs or ways to make their work compatible with their inclinations. Unlike what Case and Gosling (2010) imply, there does not seem to be a need to limit research to either one way of viewing spiritual well-being in the workplace. All three ways, to different extents, reflect work realities and none of these ways are immutable or needs to exist independently of each other.

7.4 Implications for practice

This section highlights the implications of the research findings for all levels of employees, regardless whether one is in a leadership position, is considered a ground-level employee or holds a combination of positions. This is because while the research was conducted among ground-level employees and hence may generally apply to them, the contexts of employees at other levels in the organisational hierarchy can mirror the position of ground-level employees. For instance, the pressures ground-level employees face in delivering their prescribed targets may resemble a context that leaders encounter in terms of their responsibility for organisational-level targets. And even though the findings may not apply to the leaders individually, they will help leaders better understand their employees' experience of work and thus contribute to their ability to lead and manage more effectively. The research's findings are also likely to have broad implications for human resource managers or middle-managers whose responsibilities include managing people for performance.

I highlight four implications the findings have for practice. Firstly, in order to accommodate employees who may be more spiritually-inclined, the culture of the organisation should minimally be neutral to notions of spirituality in the workplace and develop a sensitivity to how these may be facilitated or stifled by the work the employee does. A notable example from the healthcare sales industry on how a program can facilitate dialogue about spiritual well-being is the session in Johnson and Johnson's (medical

devices sales division) annual Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) meetings where invited patients talk about how their lives have improved after their surgeries with the company's medical devices. This program gives Johnson and Johnson's sales employees a glimpse of the difference they and their products make for the lives of their patients.

Aside from accommodating a variety of views on the subject, it is also important to accommodate the views of employees who may not be significantly inclined spiritually or may not be comfortable engaging with spiritual aspects of his or her life at work. Thus, organisations keen to govern with ideas surrounding spiritual well-being should make conscious efforts to also accommodate differences in what the work may mean to others, including the segment of the workforce whose inclinations at work are perhaps less spiritual.

Secondly, employees who are thus inclined need to be provided space to construct their experience of spiritual well-being on their own. This is because the experience cannot be easily manufactured into existence, either by organisations, its leaders or by the employee without significant engagement between the individual and the work s/he does. On one hand, it relieves leaders from being held fully responsible "for creating and carrying the 'meaning' of work and organization" (Lips-Wiersma and Morris, 2009, p.505). On the other hand, it is about being aware that employees cannot simply conjure up the meaning of their work. It will come across disingenuous either way.

If possible, employees should be given as much autonomy as possible to craft their work, especially aspects closely related to their work targets since these are likely to significantly influence their experience of spiritual well-being. In this way, the organisations and its leaders avoid dictating their employees' experiences of spiritual well-being (Lips-Wiersma and Morris, 2009; Driver, 2007). In this way also, issues of corporate manipulation and exploitation will be mitigated, potentially assisting greater trust, engagement and focus on the work, which is where the potential to construct the experience of spiritual well-being resides.

Thirdly, there is a need for organisations to consider the effects of key aspects of work and their capacities to either facilitate or stifle spiritual well-being experiences for the employee. Although prescribed work targets were examined in this research, other

seemingly peripheral duties may equally have significant influences on the employee's experience of work, particularly if these are either deemed by the employee to facilitate or stifle spiritual well-being to a considerable extent. In these instances, organisations may consider giving employees the flexibility to craft their work differently without compromising their effectiveness (see second implication for practice) or to keep the dialogue about such possibilities open.

Fourthly, work policies and practices ought to be generally consistent with, or at least not overwhelmingly antithetical to, the construction of spiritual well-being. This stance accounts for arguments that suggest that "work organizations are not readily compatible with spiritual strivings" (Ashforth and Pratt's, 2003, p.95). The authors contend that spirituality in the workplace is largely about the individual, concerned with intangibles and processes while organisations are predominantly about the collective, concerned with tangibles and outcomes. Despite so, Ashforth and Pratt (2003) suggest that there are avenues for individual spiritual inclinations to be approximated in organisations.

According to Ferguson and Milliman (2008), organisations, particularly ones that regard spiritual well-being as an important element to its existence, can use the organisation's values or its mission and vision to help frame its policies and practices. An exemplary example from the healthcare sales industry is that of Johnson and Johnson (J&J). In an often-cited case, J&J's Credo (value statement) was concluded to be instrumental to the company's decision in 1982 to withdraw Tylenol worldwide after seven patients who ingested the drug died due to cyanide poisoning (Collins and Porras, 1994). J&J's decision, though costing the company millions, was to reflect their Credo which states that the company's responsibility to "the doctors, nurses and patients, to mothers and fathers and all others who use our products and services" supersedes its responsibility to its investors (Johnson & Johnson, 2014).

The fifth and last implication of the findings relates to leadership. While the leaders' role is consistently being examined in research in the area (see for e.g. Csikszentmihalyi, 2004; Duchon and Plowman, 2005; Fry et al., 2011; Geh and Tan, 2009; McKee et al., 2011), significant aspects of leadership and its influence on the experience of spiritual well-being for ground-level employees did not emerge from the findings. A reason for this could be that, contrary to common assumptions, the role leaders play with regard to spiritual well-being in the workplace is perhaps not critical, at least from the ground-level employee's

point of view. What seems equally possible is that either the role leaders played with regard to spiritual well-being was not critical to my participants or that my participants were not aware of it. Future research in this area may shed more light.

This does not, however, mean that there is no significant role for leaders with regard to spiritual well-being in the workplace. For if it were so, it would mean dismissing the leader's role in the four implications for practice described earlier. Leaders can play a role in, for instance, communicating and aligning the organisation's values with its policies and practices (see fourth implication for practice) or where appropriate, develop organisational systems that enable employees greater agency over their work and work goals (see second and third implications for practice).

Despite the lack of an obvious reference to leadership, the findings do suggest that models of leadership that seek to instruct, control or manipulate employees would be less conducive for facilitating the experience among employees. Since many of the existing theories of leadership carry the implicit assumption that leadership means doing something to their employees (see for e.g. Avolio et al., 2009), these seem less viable. Alternative models of leadership that seem more conducive include co-charismatic leadership (see Robinson and Smith, 2014) which focuses on the relational nature of leadership and stresses "critical dialogue, interdependence and shared creation" (p.265). This is because there is a greater chance of co-charismatic leadership or similar leadership models to facilitate the process of constructing spiritual well-being in the workplace among employees.

7.5 Conclusion

This research views people as an important organisational resource for optimal organisational performance. It shares the belief among organisational theorists, such as Drucker (1995), McGregor (1985) and Maslow (1998), that there is value for research to understand the extents to which work and the workplace are considered 'humanising' or 'dehumanising'. Thus, this research sought to uncover narratives of what employees may be more spiritually-inclined towards with regard to what they do and their need to perform at work. This also meant taking into account the possible ways work, including its features and contexts, govern the employees' experience of spiritual well-being in the workplace.

The constructionist epistemological stance and the methodology of narrative inquiry provided a philosophically-grounded empirical approach to this research's investigative focus.

In sum, this research showed that the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance is more diverse than what the current literature suggests. This is premised on the distinctive ways spiritual inclinations were observed (or not) and the ways they interfaced with the need to meet work targets among ground-level employees. As such and importantly, the relation between spiritual well-being and work performance may be premised on what employees engage with at work, the influences therein that shape how work may be experienced to be consistent with their spiritual inclinations. In this respect, the research showed how the experience of spiritual well-being is constructed from the interplay between the employee's spiritual inclinations and their work, is an interactive and an on-going process, and hence impermanent. This research also showed that the individualised experience of spiritual well-being is necessarily contingent upon the work, especially what one is expected to achieve at work, and the extent to which the work may be amenable for the construction of the experience. Hence, this research contributes to a more grounded and expanded understanding of the experience of spiritual well-being, particularly in relation to work performance. This, in turn, generates critical insights for scholars and practitioners who are pursuing ways to develop or engage with spirituality in the workplace ideas.

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RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS NEEDED

**Have you consistently met work performance goals?
Have you thought about what work means to you?**

I am a PhD candidate at the Business School at Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, U.K. For my thesis, I am conducting a research project entitled 'Spirituality and work performance: Narratives from a select group of Healthcare Sales Professionals in Malaysia'.

I will be interested to hear from you if:

- You are a Sales Professional in a multinational Healthcare Sales Organisation (i.e. pharmaceutical, medical devices) with operations in Malaysia,
- You have met work performance goals (sales and/or non-sales) for 3 consecutive years *or* for 3 years out of a span of 5 years,
- You are willing to talk about what work means to you.

As a research participant, you will take part in 2 interviews, each lasting no longer than 60 minutes. During the interviews, you will be invited to talk about your work experiences. This research project offers an opportunity for (self) knowledge and reflection on your work achievements.

Your participation will be kept confidential. All identifiable personal details or interview accounts will be anonymized. You will be given an option to review the research projects' analysis and findings.

Interested? Please contact:

Jeffrey Yee

Email: jeffrey.yee@student.anglia.ac.uk

Mobile: 016-5161754

This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Faculty Research Ethics Panel, Lord Ashcroft International Business School, Anglia Ruskin University, United Kingdom.



Appendix B: Ethics approval



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Cambridge, 12 February, 2013

Dear Jeffrey

Project Title: *'Spirituality and work performance: Narratives from a select group of healthcare sales professionals in Malaysia'*

Principal Investigator: Jeffrey Yee

I am pleased to inform you that your ethics application has been approved by the Faculty Research Ethics Panel Chair under the terms of Anglia Ruskin University's *Policy and Code of Practice for the Conduct of Research with Human Participants* approval is for a period of three years from the 7th February 2013.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you comply with Anglia Ruskin University's Policy and Code of Practice for Research with Human Participants and specifically:

- The procedure for submitting substantial amendments to the committee, should there be any changes to your research. You cannot implement these changes until you have received approval from FREP for them.
- The procedure for reporting adverse events and incidents.
- The Data Protection Act (1998) and any other legislation relevant to your research. You must also ensure that you are aware of any emerging legislation relating to your research and make any changes to your study (which you will need to obtain ethical approval for) to comply with this.
- Obtaining any further ethical approval required from the organisation or country (if not carrying out research in the UK) where you will be carrying the research out. Please ensure that you send the FREP Secretary copies of this documentation.
- Any laws of the country where you are carrying the research out (if these conflict with any aspects of the ethical approval given, please notify FREP prior to starting the research).
- Any professional codes of conduct relating to research or research or requirements from your funding body (please note that for externally funded research, a project risk assessment must have been carried out prior to starting the research).
- Notifying the FREP Secretary when your study has ended.

Information about the above can be obtained on our website at:

<http://web.anglia.ac.uk/anet/rdcs/ethics/index.phtml>

Please also note that your research may be subject to random monitoring by the Panel.

Should you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me. May I wish you the best of luck with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Andrew Armitage
Chair of the Faculty Research Ethics Panel (FREP)
Ashcroft Building 301 - Chelmsford Campus
T: +44 (0)1223-363 271 Ext 6854 / 0845-196-6846 (direct)
E: Andrew.Armitage@anglia.ac.uk



Appendix C: Participant information sheet

Participant Information Sheet



**Anglia Ruskin
University**

Cambridge & Chelmsford

Section A: The Research Project

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1. The title of the research project is 'Spirituality and work performance: Narratives from a select group of healthcare sales professionals in Malaysia'.
2. The aim of the research project is to understand how healthcare sales professionals who perform well at work experience work to be meaningful. The research project looks into understanding how healthy performance and meaningful work can coexist among employees. Managers who are keen to improve and/or sustain performance at work while engendering meaningful work may benefit from these insights.
3. This research is organised by me. I am pursuing a PhD in Business and Management from The Lord Ashcroft International Business School, Anglia Ruskin University, United Kingdom. Relevant contact details are listed below:

Researcher: Jeffrey Yee Khong Loong (PhD candidate)

Email: jeffrey.yee@student.anglia.ac.uk

Phone Malaysia: *(to be added when I arrive in Malaysia for field work)*

Phone U.K.: +44 (0)7954 500074 (or 0044 7954 500074)

Address U.K.: Lord Ashcroft International Business School, 3rd Floor, Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge Campus, East Road, Cambridge, CB1 1PT, United Kingdom.

1st Supervisor: Dr Jonathan Smith (Senior Lecturer, Human Resource Management)

Email: jonathan.smith@anglia.ac.uk

Phone: +44 (0)1245 493131 ext. 2069 (or 0044 1245 493131 ext. 2069)

Address: Lord Ashcroft Building, 3rd Floor, Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge Campus, East Road, Cambridge, CB1 1PT, United Kingdom.

2nd Supervisor: Reverend Professor Simon Robinson (Professor of Applied and Professional Ethics)

Email: s.j.robinson@leedsmet.ac.uk

Phone: +44 (0)113 812 5346 (or 0044 113 812 5346)

Address: Bronte 109, Faculty of Health and Social Sciences, Leeds Metropolitan University, Woodhouse Lane, Leeds LS2 9EN, United Kingdom.

4. The results of the research project will be presented in my thesis. Parts of the research project (including some direct quotes from research participants) may be submitted for publication and as such may be published in academic or trade journal(s). If you prefer to, research findings will be communicated to you.
5. This research is self-funded.
6. If you require further information about the research project, kindly contact me or any of my PhD supervisors. The contact details are listed above in item 4.

¹ "The University" includes Anglia Ruskin University and its partner colleges



Section B: Your Participation in the Research Project

1. You have been identified as meeting the criteria for this research (healthcare sales professional, performs well at work and find work meaningful). As such, you have valuable experience this research is interested to hear about.
2. Your participation is voluntary.
3. You can withdraw your participation at any time by clearly stating your intention to the researcher via email, phone call, face-to-face, or any other means you may prefer. Should you decide to withdraw, you will not need to provide any explanation for the decision.
4. If you agree to take part, there will be two audio-recorded interview sessions. Each will last about 75 minutes. During the interview, the researcher will invite you to talk about your experiences at work. There will be no reimbursement for your participation.
5. This research is interested in your idea of meaningful work and how that may be compatible or incompatible with what you are expected to achieve at work. Some might find such topics emotionally distressing. If you are distressed during the interviews, you could choose not to respond, postpone the interview, or withdraw from the research altogether. If you feel you said more than you had wanted to after an interview, you can have the segment of the interview taken out from the research. There are no right or wrong views for these issues. What matters is that they are your views.
6. You are not held accountable in any way if something goes wrong in the research.
7. You will be required to travel to the interview venue on your own. The interview venue will be jointly decided by you and me; your preferences and general safety factors will be considered.
8. Audio-recorded interviews will be kept and used solely by me. The interviews will be my data for the completion of my PhD. These data may be used for future research/publications.
9. This research provides you with an opportunity for self-knowledge and reflection. Also, you could find out about related issues in research on the topic.
10. Your participation will only be known by the researcher. Identifiable personal details (name, employment history, names of co-workers, products or services portfolio, etc.) will be anonymised.
11. In the event you have a complaint which is not resolved after speaking to or do not wish to address it directly with the researcher, please visit http://web.anglia.ac.uk/anet/staff/sec_clerk/feedback.phtml#other
Alternatively, contact Jennifer Powell at complaints@anglia.ac.uk
Postal address: Office of the Secretary and Clerk, Anglia Ruskin University,
Bishop Hall Lane, Chelmsford, Essex, CM1 1SQ, United Kingdom.

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS TO KEEP,
TOGETHER WITH A COPY OF YOUR CONSENT FORM

Appendix D: Participant Consent Form



**Anglia Ruskin
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Participant Consent Form

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1. I agree to participate in this research project. I have read the Participant Information Sheet, attached with this form. I understand my role in it. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
2. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time, for any reason, without explaining for, and without prejudice. In the event I decide to withdraw from the research, I have the choice to decide whether to withdraw all or part(s) of my participation in the research.
3. I have been informed that the confidentiality and anonymity of the information I provide will be safeguarded.
4. I am free to ask any questions at any time before and during the study.
5. I agree to have the interviews audio-recorded and for the research project to use them in this and future research projects provided the confidentiality and anonymity of the information I provide is ensured.

Data Protection: I agree to the University¹ processing personal data which I have supplied. I agree to the processing of such data for any purposes connected with the Research Project as outlined to me.

Participant Name _____ Signature/Date _____

Title of the research project

Spirituality and work performance: Narratives from a select group of healthcare sales professionals in Malaysia

Main investigator and contact details

Researcher: Jeffrey Yee Khong Loong

Email contact: jeffrey.yee@student.anglia.ac.uk

Mobile contact Malaysia: *(to be added when I arrive in Malaysia for field work)* 016-5161754

Phone contact U.K.: +44 (0)7954 500074 (or 0044 7954 500074)

Address U.K.: Lord Ashcroft International Business School, 3rd Floor, Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge Campus, East Road, Cambridge, CB1 1PT, United Kingdom.

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS FORM TO KEEP

¹ "The University" includes Anglia Ruskin University and its partner colleges



Appendix E: Interview protocol for narrative interview

First interview

Topics	Interview questions
Employment history	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can you tell me about your employment history? (Non-healthcare sales: employer, year of employment, sector, designation) (Healthcare sales: employer, year of employment, sector and subsectors, therapeutic area, sales achievements)
Exploration of participants' work experiences	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tell me about your work in Company A, B, etc. 2. What are your main tasks? 3. What do you enjoy most about your work? 4. What do you enjoy least about your work? 5. Describe to me a time when you met your sales targets. 6. Describe to me a time when you did not meet your sales targets. 7. Describe to me how you feel about your work. 8. How does the work in pharmaceutical sales compare with work in medical devices sales? 9. How does the work in the GP and Retail Pharmacy subsector compare with the work in the Hospital (Private or Government) subsector? 10. Did you choose a healthcare sales job? Why?
Exploration of participants' work contexts	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Describe to me your interaction with your teammates. 2. Describe to me your interaction with your manager. 3. Describe your company to me. 4. Describe to me your interaction with your customers. 5. Do you interact with patients directly?
	Probing questions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can you tell me more about that? 2. Describe to me what happened. 3. What was the experience like for you?

Second interview

Topics	Interview questions
Continued exploration of participants' work experiences, if necessary	(utilizing interview questions from the first interview)
Deeper exploration of selected events, experiences or comments participants made in the first interview.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In the first interview, you said, ".....". Can you expand on that?
Closing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is there anything about your work you would like to tell me that I did not ask about?
Demographic details	(age, religious affiliations if any, additional information about employment history)
Debriefing	(explain my research in greater detail, clarify questions participants may have about the research)

Appendix F: Transcription symbols

Symbols	Meaning
(words)	Anonymized portion
(<i>words</i>)	Translation from local dialects to the English language
(... words ...)	Condensed segment of talk
[words]	Interviewer's voice
—	abrupt cessation of talk
(.)	clear discernible pause
(^word^)	other spontaneous parts of speech, e.g. laughs