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Workplace spirituality, work engagement and thriving at work

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Orientation: In order to create competitive advantage in an increasingly turbulent economic environment, sustainability of high performance is crucial. Only a few individuals have the drive, mindset, discipline and ability to sustain high performance on a daily basis. Thus, it is necessary to consider what can be done so that employees can sustain high performance over the long term.

Research purpose: The purpose of the study was to establish whether spiritual workplaces will enhance employees' work engagement and thriving at work.

Motivation for the study: Two important mechanisms for understanding the human dimension of sustainability are thriving at work and work engagement. However, because work engagement and thriving are affective-motivational states, it is necessary to consider contextual factors that promote these positive states. As work engagement and thriving at work move beyond mere energy, to a sense of connectedness, it seems important that spiritual workplaces are created.

Research approach, design and method: The study was quantitative in nature, and data were collected from employees working at small, medium and macro enterprises (SMMEs) in one geographical area in South Africa. The final sample consisted of 259 employees. A survey that was cross-sectional in nature was conducted by means of a self-administered questionnaire.

Main findings: The findings of the study show that there is a positive and significant relationship between workplace spirituality, work engagement and thriving at work. Furthermore, workplace spirituality significantly influences the variance in both work engagement and thriving at work.

Practical or managerial implications: In order for SMMEs to promote work engagement and thriving at work, spiritual workplaces need to be created. Furthermore, emphasis needs to be placed on the work experience, rather than on work outcomes. It is also important that SMMEs develop employees holistically, that they create spiritually based organisational cultures and that they pay more attention to relationship management and networking.

Contribution or value-add: The study contributes to the literature on workplace spirituality, work engagement and thriving at work.

Introduction

In order to create competitive advantage in an increasingly turbulent economic environment, sustainability of high performance is crucial. Unfortunately, only a few individuals have the drive, the mindset, the discipline and the ability to sustain high performance on a daily basis (Llopis, 2012) and over a long period of time. An important mechanism for understanding the human dimension of sustainability is thriving at work (Spreitzer, Porath & Gibson, 2012). A recent study showed that thriving employees demonstrate 16% better performance and are 125% less prone to burnout than their peers, 32% of thriving employees had higher levels of organisational commitment, and 46% of such employees reported job satisfaction (Spreitzer & Porath, 2012). Furthermore, thriving is perceived as a buffer to negative psychological outcomes, such as burnout, and is critical for sustaining performance, health and well-being (Porath, Spreitzer, Gibson & Garnett, 2012). Similar to thriving, work engagement is a positive energy that advances sustainable performance (Spreitzer, Lam & Fritz, 2010). Having work engagement implies that employees will be focused, dedicated and energetic when they come to work, which will enhance and sustain their performance (Bakker & Leiter, 2010). Thus, work engagement could potentially enhance the success and competitiveness of businesses, which is much needed in the current economic landscape (Hoole & Bonnema, 2015). However, both work engagement and thriving

cannot be regarded as skills that can be developed, but rather as affective-motivational states (Spreitzer et al., 2010), which suggests that organisations need to create working environments that cultivate work engagement and thriving. As both work engagement and thriving move beyond mere energy, to a sense of connectedness, it seems important that spiritual workplaces are created, so that employees can experience such a sense of connectedness, which is a core component of workplace spirituality (Milliman, Czaplewski & Ferguson, 2003). Moreover, contextual features of the work unit and resources that are produced in work processes, such as meaning and knowledge, promote the experience of learning, which is a core component of thriving at work (Prem, Ohly, Kubicek & Korunka, 2017). The importance of contextual features is also argued by Ryan and Deci (2000) who propose that although all people have the capacity to grow and develop, success in this area depends on the context in which they act (Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein & Grant, 2005). Moreover, Breytenbach (2016) found that organisations have to be spiritual in order for employees to experience spirituality that promotes work engagement. Thus, it is argued that spiritual workplaces will enhance employees' work engagement and thriving at work in a small business setting.

The relationship between workplace spirituality, work engagement and thriving at work has not been thoroughly investigated in empirical studies or in the South African context. However, interest in workplace spirituality and work engagement has increased considerably over the last decade (Saks, 2011). Saks (2011) explains the theory of the connection between workplace spirituality and employee engagement. However, it should be noted that the focus of this study will be work engagement, not employee engagement. The difference is that work engagement refers to the relationship of an individual with his or her job, whereas employee engagement refers to the relationship of an individual with both his or her job and the organisation (Schaufeli, as cited in Rothmann, 2017). Both workplace spirituality and employee engagement suggest a sense of completeness and wholeness, which implies simultaneous investment of all aspects of oneself (cognitive, physical, emotional and spiritual) when performing a role (Saks, 2011). Furthermore, both workplace spirituality and employee engagement require a sense of connectedness in the context of the workplace (Saks, 2011). The similarities that exist between workplace spirituality and employee engagement possibly suggest that spiritually based organisations will enable employees to fully engage themselves in their work roles. This assertion is confirmed by Spreitzer et al. (2005), who state that work and the context of work may have a toxic effect on human vitality and health. Therefore, if organisations transform their workplaces to become more spiritual, it will possibly become an important new driver of work engagement, thriving at work and positive health. The latter is confirmed by Breytenbach (2016), finding a strong positive relationship between the experience of spirituality at work and work engagement for a South African sample. This finding implies that 'the extent to which people feel engaged and immerged at work is therefore somewhat dependent on the extent to which they experience spirit in their work' (Breytenbach, 2016, p. 332).

Although the relationship between workplace spirituality and work engagement has previously been studied, less attention has been given to the relationship between workplace spirituality and thriving. In a study by McIntosh (2015), the relationship between thriving and spirituality of students involved in higher education was investigated. It was established that students' level of spirituality predicts their level of thriving (McIntosh, 2015). Dowling et al. (2004) also studied spirituality and thriving for an adolescent sample, and they asserted that if thriving is driven by spirituality, it will lead to positive outcomes, such as competence, confidence, character, social connection, compassion and caring. The aforementioned research studies clearly established an association between individual spirituality and thriving for adolescents and college students. However, the aforementioned studies were not conducted in the context of the workplace, neither was spirituality investigated from an organisational perspective.

As small, medium and macro enterprises (SMMEs) make a significant contribution towards South Africa's gross domestic product (GDP) and employment rates (Smit & Watkins, 2012), continued research in this sector is important. It is further vital that entrepreneurs realise that the pressure to compete in a capitalist economy, which is profit-driven, has to a large extent dehumanised workplaces (Vasconcelos, 2015). This is in direct conflict with the need of contemporary employees, who require humanisation of work and workplaces (Shuck & Rose, 2013). As such, dehumanised workplaces need to be transformed into spiritually based workplaces that are concerned with wholeness, relationships, spiritual values, and finding meaning and purpose at work, which is consistent with the assertions in contemporary workplace literature (Weinberg & Locander, 2014). With the intention of stimulating work engagement and thriving at work, it is not only necessary that SMMEs regard these constructs as positive outcomes but also that a stronger emphasis be placed on the work experience, which should be meaningful (Shuck & Rose, 2013). This does not mean that employees do not value a fair salary at the end of the month, but because the contemporary employees spend more time at work than employees have done historically, and they therefore define themselves in terms of their work, and are socially defined by their work (Geldenhuys, Laba & Venter, 2014), it is necessary that SMMEs pay attention to the work experience. In this regard, it is necessary that spiritual workplaces are created that value aspects such as meaningful and purposeful work, awareness of life, connectedness and compassion, so as to promote the work experience. By establishing a relationship between work engagement, thriving at work and workplace spirituality, the need to transform SMMEs into spiritual workplaces that contribute to the survival and profitability of the organisation, as well as its competitive advantage, will be confirmed.

Research purpose and objectives

The aim of this article is to report on the relationship between thriving at work, work engagement and workplace spirituality. The reason for this is that it is critical for entrepreneurs to promote sustainable performance of employees. Furthermore, previous research studies have mostly been concerned with the outcomes of performance, rather than the conditions or the context that motivates performance (Shuck & Rose, 2013). It is reported that South African SMMEs often struggle with human resource (HR) issues, such as low labour productivity, stringent labour legislation, high labour turnover and poorly trained employees (Brink, Cant & Ligthelm, 2003). In addition, compared to larger companies, with whom they are competing in the same product market, SMMEs need to do more with fewer employees (Smit & Watkins, 2012). This situation requires that entrepreneurs need to reassess their current work practices, values and organisational cultures, in order to support the contemporary employee to do his or her work with passion and energy. Porath et al. (2012) assert that scholars have called for examination of thriving in different settings and with a variety of samples. Hence, it is appropriate to consider thriving at work in South African SMMEs, because it has not been considered in this kind of work environment.

The research objective of the study was to determine the relationship between thriving at work, work engagement and workplace spirituality. The secondary objective was to establish the degree to which the variance in thriving at work and work engagement can be attributed to workplace spirituality. The research hypotheses for the study are:

H_1: There is a positive relationship between thriving at work and workplace spirituality.

H_2: There is a positive relationship between work engagement and workplace spirituality.

H_{01}: There is no relationship between thriving at work and workplace spirituality.

H_{02}: There is no relationship between work engagement and workplace spirituality.

In the following section, a literature review will be presented of workplace spirituality, work engagement and thriving at work. This will be followed by an exposition of the findings of the study and its implications for SMMEs.

Literature review

Workplace spirituality

Workplace spirituality is a fairly new construct, which has gained increased interest in the past two decades, both among academics and among the corporate world (Houghton, Neck & Krishnakumar, 2016). This is mainly because of the changing nature of work and the realisation that the spiritual dimension of employees has been neglected for many years (Parumasur & Govender, 2016). Furthermore, globally there has been a call for humanisation of work and workplaces (Shuck & Rose, 2013). Van der Walt and De Klerk (2014, p. 381) combined the definitions of workplace spirituality offered by Ashmos and Duchon (2000), Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003) and Kolodinsky, Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2008). They defined workplace spirituality as the spiritual nature of the organisation itself (Kolodinsky et al., 2008), evidenced by spiritual organisational values and a culture that facilitates employees' experience and sense of being connected to others in a way that provides feelings of completeness and joy (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003), with the recognition of an inner life that nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work in the context of the work community (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). From the foregoing definition, it is clear that workplace spirituality includes both an individual and an organisational component. Although some researchers are of the opinion that workplace spirituality should include both organisational and individual dimensions, others hold the opinion that workplace spirituality can be viewed from either an organisational or an individual perspective (e.g. Krishnakumar & Neck, 2002). For the purposes of this study, workplace spirituality is considered from an organisational perspective. The reason being that engagement and thriving are desirable subjective experiences that may be regarded as psychological states rather than individual dispositions (Cooper & Leiter, 2017). Therefore, engagement and thriving in the context of the workplace could be promoted by supportive working environments, such as those that are spiritually based. From an organisational perspective, workplace spirituality is regarded as the spiritual nature of the organisation itself, which is evidenced by the organisation's spiritual values and a culture that facilitates employees' experience and sense of connectedness with others (Kolodinsky, Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2004, 2008). Moreover, this spiritually based culture promotes feelings of completeness and joy, with the recognition of an inner life that nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work (Kolodinsky et al., 2004, 2008).

Because of the personal nature of spirituality, the constructs of spirituality and workplace spirituality lack conceptual clarity, and this has led to subjective categorisation of the constructs (Pardasani, Sharma & Bindlish, 2014). For the purposes of this study, the dimensions of spirituality as identified by Wheat (1991) will be used, namely larger context, awareness of life, and meaning and purpose. The reason for this is that these dimensions were used by Kolodinsky et al. (2004) to develop the Organizational Spiritual Values Scale (OSVS), which was used to measure workplace spirituality. The scales of the OSVS measure whether organisations value spiritual dimensions, such as meaning and purpose (also referred to as larger context) and awareness of life, which includes spiritual dimensions such as connectedness, the experience of sacredness in living things, personal reflection and growth, health and inner peace, and compassion, which includes aspects such as being sensitive towards the needs of others and the value of life.

Previously, spirituality has been considered in relation to entrepreneurship, and the relationship between spirituality

and entrepreneurship has gained increased attention in recent years (Godwin, Neck & D'Intino, 2016). However, the emphasis of these studies has been mostly on the entrepreneur, and, as a result, empirical studies have not considered workplace spirituality in the entrepreneurial context from an organisational perspective. Relationships that have been established between workplace spirituality (from an organisational perspective) and positive outcomes, although not in an entrepreneurial context, include job involvement (Milliman et al., 2003; Van der Walt & Swanepoel, 2015), job satisfaction (Van der Walt & De Klerk, 2014), organisational commitment (Rego & Cunha, 2008), and employee performance and effectiveness (Karakas, 2010). As workplace spirituality at organisational level has been found to be related to work attitudes such as job satisfaction, job involvement and organisational commitment, it is postulated that workplace spirituality will be related to work engagement, and possibly thriving at work.

Work engagement

Work engagement is regarded as a three-dimensional construct and is defined as a positive, fulfilling work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli, Taris & Van Rhenen, 2008). Vigour refers to the physical component of work engagement, which includes high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, willingness to invest effort in one's work and persistence in the face of difficulties (Coetzee & De Villiers, 2010). Dedication refers to the emotional side of work engagement, and it includes characteristics such as a sense of significance, efficacy, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge (Coetzee & De Villiers, 2010). Dedication is similar to duty orientation, and from a spiritual perspective, it refers to performing one's duties with the utmost devotion, which will lead to finding meaning in one's work (Pardasani et al., 2014). Absorption refers to the cognitive component of work engagement, which includes aspects such as being fully focused on something and experiencing a high level of concentration while performing a task (Coetzee & De Villiers, 2010). This dimension of work engagement is also addressed in spirituality. Pardasani et al. (2014) assert that if an employee is not excessively attached to results, it helps them to attain evenness of mind and improved concentration.

Employees that are engaged in their work have high levels of energy, enthusiastically identify with their jobs and are typically happily engrossed in their work, such that time passes quickly (Miner, Bickerton, Dowson & Sterland, 2015). As such, work engagement is often referred to as an employee's passion for work. Work engagement has two main antecedents, namely job resources and personal resources (Bakker, Albrecht & Leiter 2011). Job resources refer to supervisory support, innovativeness, information, appreciation and organisational climate (Rice, 2009, p. 5), and personal resources refer to an individual's positive psychological state of development, characterised by (1) having confidence (self-efficacy) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed in challenging tasks; (2) making a positive attribution (optimism) about succeeding now and in the future; (3) persevering towards goals, and when necessary, redirecting paths to goals (hope) in order to succeed; and (4) when beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (resilience) to attain success (Bakker et al., 2011, p. 7). Another antecedent of work engagement is task-related aspects, which refer to specific task features (Sonnentag, 2011). Work engagement has also been studied in relation to a number of organisational outcomes. Previous studies have found that work engagement is negatively related to intention to quit and positively related to job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Schaufeli et al., 2008). It has also been asserted that employees that are engaged in their work are likely to perform well; to experience positive health and positive emotions (Calitz, 2013); to be better equipped to address issues in the workplace, such as stress and change (Rice, 2009); to be more driven; and to be key role players in helping to move the organisation forward (Krueger & Killham, as cited in Rice, 2009). It has been found that work engagement can become fairly stable over the long term, but that it may fluctuate from week to week, from day to day and even from hour to hour (Sonnentag, 2011). This shows the importance of creating spiritual workplaces, which will support work engagement over the long term. Lastly, although the relationship between workplace spirituality and work engagement has previously not received sufficient attention in empirical studies, the relationship between work engagement and meaning and purpose has previously been investigated, and it was found that psychological meaningfulness predicts work engagement (Geldenhuys et al., 2014).

Thriving at work

Although work engagement conceptually overlaps with thriving at work to some extent, they may be regarded as two separate constructs (Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter & Toris, 2008). Both work engagement and thriving at work include an energy component, that is, vitality and vigour, but thriving at work includes learning, whereas work engagement includes dedication and absorption. The concept of thriving at work originates from the work of Maslow (1943), Rogers (1961) and Alderfer (1972) (Porath et al., 2012). It is an emerging construct that captures individuals' psychological well-being (Xy, Loi, Chow & Kwok, 2016). Thriving is regarded as a psychological state that is shaped and influenced by the work context; thus, it is not a stable disposition, but a temporary internal property of an individual (Porath et al., 2012; Spreitzer et al., 2005, 2010). In accordance with the socially embedded theory of thriving at work, thriving is defined as a sense of progress, or forward movement, in one's self-development (Spreitzer et al., 2005).

Human thriving is regarded as a two-dimensional construct that consists of two components, namely vitality and learning (Spreitzer et al., 2010). Vitality is regarded as the affective dimension of thriving, and it refers to a sense of being alive, passionate and excited, and having a zest for work. Learning, the cognitive dimension, refers to the

growth that comes from gaining new knowledge and skills, as well as the application thereof (Spreitzer et al., 2005, 2010). Thus, when people thrive at work, they will feel or experience a sense of progress and momentum (Spreitzer et al., 2005), and confidence and capability (Wallace, Butts, Johnson, Stevens & Smith, 2013). It has been asserted that thriving at work will guide employees in goal-directed activities and across changing circumstances, and that it will contribute to positive mental and physical health (Spreitzer et al., 2005). Thus, together, learning and vitality are regarded as reflecting self-regulation in the workplace, which provides employees with internal cues that they can use to assess their progress (Wallace et al., 2013). Thriving also helps employees to adjust to their work context, and, as such, thriving employees are better able to assess their own development, in order to improve their short-term effectiveness and long-term adaptability to the work context (Wallace et al., 2013).

Thriving at work has been associated with various individual and organisational outcomes. For example, Porath et al. (2012) found that thriving enhances the health (physical and psychological well-being), job performance and career development of employees. It can also benefit the organisation, through increased performance and lower heath care costs (Porath et al., 2012). It has been asserted that thriving at work cannot be cultivated merely by decreasing stressors in the workplace, but that it requires an increase in the presence of specific psychological states, behaviours, resources and contextual features (Spreitzer et al., 2005). This implies that workplace spirituality, as a contextual factor, could promote thriving at work. It is also necessary to consider factors that promote thriving at work. In this regard, Paterson, Luthans and Jeung (2014) reported that in line with the self-determination theory of Ryan and Deci (2000), and the social cognitive theory of Bandura (2001), psychological capital and agentic work behaviours, such as task focus and heedful relating, will promote thriving at work, which implies that employees that are more active and purposeful at work are more likely to sustain learning and vitality in the workplace (Paterson et al., 2014). Paterson et al. (2014) further emphasise the influence of the organisational climate and culture in the individual's work environment on their thriving at work. In this article, the argument is offered that a spiritually based organisational culture functions as a contextual influence on employees' vitality and work engagement.

Theoretical framework

In order to explain how the work context promotes work engagement and thriving at work, the self-determination theory of Ryan and Deci (2000) is used. The self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) explains that individuals have three psychological needs, namely autonomy, competence and relatedness needs. Autonomy refers to the desire to experience freedom of choice when making decisions (Janse van Rensburg, Rothmann & Diedericks, 2017). Spreitzer et al. (2005) assert that:

> when individuals are embedded in unit context that encourage decision-making discretion, information sharing, and a climate of trust and respect, they are likely to respond with agentic behaviours that promote the experience of thriving. (p. 540)

The importance of facilitating work engagement through task-related job resources such as autonomy and developmental opportunities has also been alluded to in HR management literature (Van de Voorde, Van Veldhoven & Veld, 2016). It has also been found that work engagement enhances employee knowledge sharing and innovative work behaviour (Kim & Park, 2017). Previous research findings have also confirmed that workplace spirituality promotes information sharing (Rahman, Daud, Hassan & Osmangani, 2016) and possibly honesty and trust (Houghton et al., 2016).

Competence refers to individuals' inherent desires to control outcomes and experience environmental mastery (Janse van Rensburg et al., 2017). In order to experience environmental mastery, self-development through learning and vitality (core components of thriving at work) are essential and should be promoted in order to satisfy this psychological need and to promote psychological functioning. The experience of work engagement is also promoted when employees feel empowered to accomplish their work in a meaningful way (Cooper & Leiter, 2017). Thus, thriving and engagement in the work context should be advanced through spiritually based organisations valuing meaning and purpose. Relatedness needs refer to the need to connect to others, which is similar to the sense of connectedness which is a core component of workplace spirituality. Workplace spirituality facilitates employees' experience and sense of connectedness with others (Kolodinsky et al., 2004, 2008) which could promote thriving and engagement. The satisfaction of the aforementioned basic psychological needs will serve as a motivational mechanism that energises and directs employees' behaviour (Van den Broek, Vansteenkiste, De Witte, Soenens & Lens, 2010). This psychological need satisfaction is essential to stimulate optimal functioning and well-being (Van den Broek et al., 2010). It is argued that through spiritually based workplaces, employees' need for autonomy, competence and relatedness will be satisfied, which will serve as a motivational mechanism that promotes thriving and engagement.

Research design

Research approach

The study was conducted in the positivist paradigm, and it was quantitative in nature. Quantitative research was appropriate for the purposes of this research, which were to determine whether there is a statistically significant relationship between the independent variable, namely workplace spirituality, and the dependent variables, namely work engagement and thriving at work. The survey research design that was used was cross-sectional in nature, as the research was carried out at a specific point in time.

Research method

Research participants

The target population of the study was employees working at SMMEs in a town situated in the Free State province of South Africa. As there are no official statistics available regarding the number of SMMEs that operate within this area, convenience sampling was used to draw the sample, because readily accessible respondents were requested to participate in the research project (Jordan, Werner & Venter, 2015). A total of 35 SMMEs operating within various sectors of the economy were included in the study. Because it was not possible to obtain official statistics regarding the number of employees that are working at SMMEs in the town included in the study or at the organisations included in the study, it was decided to draw a sample from the number of residents in the town, working at SMMEs based on national statistics which totalled 26 880 people (Statistics South Africa, 2011). In order to draw a sample from this population, the Raosoft sample size calculator recommends a sample size of 379 for this population size, at a confidence level of 95%. Although 379 questionnaires were distributed, only 259 were returned and usable. Thus, the study had a response rate of 68.3%.

The final sample consisted of 154 males (59.46%) and 103 (39.77%) females. In terms of population group, 57.92% (n = 150) of the sample was African, followed by 38.61% (n = 100) white respondents, 1.54% (n = 4) mixed race respondents and one Indian or Asian respondent, who accounted for 0.39% of the sample. With regard to age, 42.47% (n = 110) of the sample ranged between 35 years and younger, followed by 39.38% (n = 102) between the age of 35 and 52 years, and 11.20% (n = 29) in the age group of 53 years and older. Lastly, regarding highest academic qualification, most of the sample had Grade 10 or 11 (n = 120; 46.33%), followed by respondents with a Grade 12 qualification (n = 74; 28.57%), respondents with a certificate or degree or diploma (n = 51; 19.69%) and respondents with a postgraduate qualification (n = 12; 4.63%).

Measuring instrument

The measuring instrument consisted of four sections. Section A consisted of a self-constructed biographical questionnaire. The biographical questionnaire was designed by the researcher in such a way that it would solicit relevant demographic information from the participants in terms of their sex, race, age and highest educational qualification. Section B consisted of a questionnaire to measure thriving at work. The measuring instrument developed by Porath et al. (2012) was used in this section. The questionnaire comprised 10 items consisting of two factors, namely vitality and learning. Response categories were in a Likert-scale format, with responses ranging from 1 ('strongly disagree') to 7 ('strongly agree'). The questionnaire included items such as 'I find myself learning often' and 'I have energy and spirit'. Section C consisted of a questionnaire measuring workplace spirituality. Workplace spirituality was measured using Kolodinsky et al.'s (2004) OSVS. The OSVS assesses an individual's perceptions of the spiritual values exhibited by the organisation that the individual works for, and it consists of three factors, namely awareness of life, meaning and purpose, and compassion. The OSVS consists of 20 items, and scoring is done through a Likert-type scale, where responses range from 1 ('completely false') to 5 ('completely true'). Items included in the OSVS are, for example, 'in this organisation there is a sense of sacredness in life'; 'in this organisation, all forms of life are valuable'; and 'in this organisation, we are encouraged to actively seek a sense of purpose in life'. Section D consisted of a questionnaire measuring work engagement. Work engagement was measured using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES). The UWES consists of 17 questions and three factors, namely vigour, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). Response categories were in a Likert-scale format, with responses ranging from 0 ('never') to 6 ('every day'), and they included items such as 'I am bursting with energy in my work' and 'My job inspires me'.

Research procedure

The self-administered questionnaires were personally distributed by the researcher and trained fieldworkers. The questionnaires were collected personally by the researcher and the fieldworkers at a prearranged time and day.

Ethical consideration

The purpose of the study as well as ethical considerations, such as informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality, was explained in a cover letter. It was indicated in the cover letter that participation was voluntary and that participants may withdraw from the study at any time.

Statistical analysis

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 was used to carry out the statistical analysis. Both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were performed. Descriptive statistics consist of measures of central tendency, including means, medians, standard deviations, skewness and kurtosis (Salkind, 2012). Inferential statistical analysis was performed using the Pearson's product-moment correlation, to determine statistically significant relationships between workplace spirituality, thriving at work and work engagement, and their respective facets. A multiple regression analysis was performed to establish the degree to which the variance in work engagement and thriving at work can be attributed to workplace spirituality.

Results

Validity and reliability of the questionnaire

The factor analysis of thriving at work, workplace spiritualty and work engagement confirmed the factor structure of the constructs. The validity of the instruments was assessed using reliability tests such as the Cronbach's alpha coefficient and composite reliability, convergent validity and

discriminant validity. Prior to the distribution of the final questionnaire, the constructed questionnaire was distributed to two experts in the field of HR management, in order to ensure face validity.

The reliability and validity assessment results are indicated in Table 1.

The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for workplace spirituality (measured by the OSVS) may be regarded as good (0.83). This is slightly lower than the Cronbach's alpha coefficients reported by Kolodinsky et al. (2008) for an international sample (0.93) and reported by Van der Walt and De Klerk (2014) for a South African sample (0.95). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for work engagement (measured by the UWES) is 0.75. This is lower than the Cronbach's alpha coefficients reported for an international sample, namely 0.92 (Lawrence, 2009, p. 123), and a South African sample, namely 0.97 (Matla, 2009). In another South African study, the three subscales of the UWES yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.88 (vigour), 0.91 (dedication) and 0.86 (absorption), respectively (Du Plooy & Roodt, 2010). The internal consistency of the thriving at work scale, consisting of learning and vitality, is also good, with vitality yielding a Cronbach's alpha of 0.84 and learning yielding a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.78, which can be seen as good. The convergent validity of all the constructs appearing in the measurement model is good (i.e. the AVE scores were all above 0.5). The discriminant validity is also supported which indicates that the constructs are significantly different from each other. This implies that the instruments are reliable and valid for this study.

Measures of central tendency

Table 2 indicates the measures of central tendency for thriving at work, workplace spirituality and work engagement. Please note that the median represents the 50% mark in each case.

As can be seen from Table 2, only one variable has a mean score higher than the median, namely awareness of life, with a mean of 16.01 and a median of 16. The remainder of the facets have low scores, which shows that the respondents perceived the SMMEs that they are working for as valuing some aspects related to the sacredness of life, connection to the world at large, personal reflection and growth, and health and inner peace. However, the results suggest that the SMMEs do not value meaning and purpose at work sufficiently, neither do they agree that they are learning and feeling energised at work. The sample further indicated that they seldom feel dedicated and absorbed at work.

TABLE 1: Reliability and validity assessment.

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE	MSV
Vitality	0.84	0.85	0.53	0.33
Work spirituality	0.83	0.84	0.51	0.14
Learning	0.78	0.84	0.58	0.33
Work engagement	0.75	0.75	0.50	0.24

AVE, average variance extracted; CR, convergent validity; MSV, maximum shared variance.

TABLE 2: Measures of central tendency (n = 259).

Construct	Sub-construct	*N*	Min	Max	Mean	Median	SD
Thriving at work	Learning	259	7	35	29.89	30	4.19
	Vitality	259	13	35	28.18	29	4.86
Workplace spirituality	Meaning and purpose	258	12	50	42.93	44	5.88
	Awareness of life	258	4	20	16.01	16	2.70
	Compassion	258	6	30	24.52	25	4.01
Work engagement	Vigour	259	9	36	28.33	29	4.75
	Dedication	259	10	30	25.47	26	3.87
	Absorption	259	11	36	28.49	30	4.69

SD, standard deviation.

Correlations between workplace spirituality, work engagement and thriving at work

Table 3 reflects the correlations between thriving at work, workplace spirituality and work engagement.

Multiple regression analysis

Multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the influence of workplace spirituality on thriving at work and work engagement (see Table 4). Note that normality was assumed.

To answer the research question 'How much variance in thriving at work and work engagement can be explained by workplace spirituality?', a standard multiple regression analysis was performed. As can be seen from Table 4, workplace spirituality contributes 9.86% to the variance in thriving at work and 24.21% to the variance in work engagement. Both regression results are positive, which suggests that as workplace spirituality increases, so do thriving at work and work engagement. However, workplace spirituality has a greater impact on work engagement than on thriving at work.

TABLE 3: Pearson's product-moment correlation results for thriving at work, workplace spirituality and work engagement (n = 259).

Construct	Category	Thriving at work	Workplace spirituality	Work engagement
Thriving at work	Pearson's correlation	1	0.31*	0.43*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	-	0.000	0.000
	N	259	258	259
Workplace spirituality	Pearson's correlation	0.31*	1	0.49*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	-	0.000
	N	258	258	258
Work engagement	Pearson's correlation	0.43*	0.49*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	-
	N	259	258	259

Sig., significance.
*, $p \leq 0.01$.

TABLE 4: Multiple regression analysis results, where workplace spirituality is the independent variable, and thriving at work and work engagement are the dependent variables.

Variable	Workplace spirituality							
	R	R^2	*F*	β	*T*	*p*	Partial correlation	VIF
Thriving at work	0.31	0.0986	27.96	0.31	5.29	0.000**	0.31	1.00
Work engagement	0.49	0.2421	81.95	0.49	9.05	0.000**	0.49	1.00

R, *R*-value; R^2, *R*-squared value; *F*, *F*-value; β, beta-value; *p*, significance; VIF, variance inflation factor.

Discussion

The research objective of the study was to determine the relationship between thriving at work, work engagement and workplace spirituality. The findings indicate that both thriving at work and work engagement were related to workplace spirituality. The relationship between thriving at work and workplace spirituality was moderately positive, and the first research hypothesis is thus accepted. This suggests that higher levels of workplace spirituality could lead to higher levels of thriving at work and work engagement. The findings also indicate that work engagement was positively and significantly related to workplace spirituality. The second research hypothesis is thus accepted. This implies that higher levels of workplace spirituality could lead to higher levels of thriving at work. As such, organisations could potentially promote thriving at work and work engagement, by focusing more on workplace spirituality. However, although workplace spirituality significantly influences both thriving at work and work engagement, it influences work engagement to a greater degree. Although the relationships between workplace spirituality and thriving at work were significant, the variance was low. Therefore, although a statistical significant relationship emerged, it may be practically insignificant.

Practical implications

In terms of thriving at work, both vitality and learning had low scores. It was noted that although respondents disagreed that they are learning at work, they agreed that SMMEs value awareness of life. This may suggest that although organisations value personal reflection and growth, sufficient learning opportunities are not presented to employees working in SMMEs. However, it has been stated that thriving at work should be considered as a joint experience of vitality and learning, because the two dimensions together capture the affective and cognitive components of individual growth and development in a work context (Porath et al., 2012). Thus, SMMEs are likely to benefit from considering both the work that employees are doing in SMMEs and whether sufficient opportunities are provided to them to learn and develop. If employees are provided with the opportunity to learn and develop, it will possibly manifest in increased zest for work. To promote learning and vitality (and thus thriving at work), SMMEs should consider introducing initiatives such as decision-making discretion, broad information sharing and sharing of feedback, and they should endeavour to create a climate of civility (Porath et al., 2012).

All the facets of work engagement, namely vigour, dedication and absorption, had low scores, which suggests that employees do not feel emerged at work, and as enthusiastically identifying with and engaging in their work. Thus, they do not feel particularly passionate about the work they do. Previous studies investigating work engagement for South African samples have found contradictory results, indicating positive work engagement (Swanepoel, 2015). However, Hoole and Bonnema (2015) assert that although organisations recognise the advantages of work engagement and meaningful work, the actual levels thereof are far from ideal.

The findings of the study further suggest that it will be to the advantage of SMMEs to promote the experience of spirituality at work. This can be done by valuing relationships between employees and by creating compassionate working environments. It is critical that continuous learning opportunities are presented to employees, which can be done through on-the-job and off-the-job training. Consideration should also be given to aspects such as job rotation, job enrichment and job enlargement, to promote personal and holistic growth. Holistic growth and development are emphasised by Neck and Milliman (1994), who state that employees should be provided with opportunities to experience personal growth and development, so that they can achieve self-actualisation. Furthermore, jobs should be carefully designed, and consideration should therefore be given to aspects such as task identity, autonomy, skill variety and job challenge, in order to promote meaningful work engagement among employees. In this regard, Pardasani et al. (2014) postulate that jobs should be designed in such a way that they fulfil employees' need for meaning and purpose in their work, rather than focusing only on enhancement of motivation and satisfaction. This requires a holistic approach to employee development, which includes mind, body and spiritual dimensions. It is also necessary that SMMEs should attempt to understand the individual needs of employees and that a culture of trust is established, in which employees will feel safe to discuss their problems and private matters. Therefore, it is suggested that stronger emphasis needs to be placed on effective communication and relationship building. Management and owners of SMMEs should consider developing active listening skills, and they should set time aside to engage with employees on a personal basis, in order to strengthen relationships at work and beyond the workplace. This is critical, because positive relationships impact on employees' experience of work, and they contribute to their growth, development and energy levels at work (Gerbasi, Porath, Parker, Spreitzer & Cross, 2015).

It is also critical to assign new employees to mentors, to assist them to become familiar with the organisational culture and to develop mutual trust and positive relationships. Weinberg and Locander (2014, p. 394) allude to the importance of spiritual mentoring, which they explain as 'contributing to a protégé's [new employee's] personal growth and development by providing a context that nourishes the protégé's individual spirit through recognition of his or her inner life and by providing or suggesting meaningful work appealing to the protégé's own sense of calling', which thus 'promotes an experience of transcendence through the work process'. However, it is acknowledged that not all employees are spiritual, and, as such, SMMEs should not adopt a one-size-fits-all perspective, but should allow for individual differences, and should take cognisance of these when matching new employees (protégés) with mentors.

Limitations and recommendations

The study has a number of limitations that need to be noted. Firstly, a non-probability sampling technique was used, and data were gathered at a specific location. This may compromise the external validity of the research reported on. Therefore, caution needs to be taken when generalising the findings to the larger population. Secondly, common-method variance may have influenced the results, because a cross-sectional study was conducted, and self-administered questionnaires were used to collect the data, which contained more than one construct that respondents had to respond to at the same time. Thirdly, the sample was not representative of the population, and therefore, the findings cannot be generalised to the larger population. However, an acceptable response rate was obtained, and the final sample consisted of an adequate number of respondents in order to achieve the research objectives of the study. Despite the above limitations, the study holds important implications for SMMEs that wish to promote sustainable performance.

According to the self-determination theory of Ryan and Deci (2000), self-regulatory processes are influenced by both individual and contextual factors. This study focused on only a contextual factor (i.e. workplace spirituality) to promote work engagement and thriving, and, as such, it is recommended that future studies should include both contextual and individual factors, in order to establish how the interaction between these factors influences self-directed behaviour (Wallace et al., 2013). Previous studies have also indicated that work values influence employees' experience of meaningful work, which could have an impact on their experience of work engagement (Hoole & Bonnema, 2015). As such, it will be interesting to measure the values (both personal and work values) of employees working in SMMEs, and the extent to which these values influence employees' experience of meaningful work and other dimensions of workplace spirituality, and, consequently, work engagement and thriving at work. Although work engagement has been the focus of many empirical studies, thriving at work is a newer construct, and, as such, more research should be conducted regarding the individual and contextual variables that can promote thriving at work. Furthermore, because most businesses overemphasise profitability, workplaces are rife with depleted and unhappy workers, who engage in deviant and unethical behaviour. Therefore, it is necessary to establish whether spiritually based organisations that focus on the work experience, rather than on work outcomes, promote ethical behaviour and mindfulness.

Conclusion

The study contributes to the limited body of knowledge regarding workplace spirituality and its relationship with positive outcomes, such as thriving at work and work engagement. Specifically, the study found that workplace spirituality influences both thriving at work and work engagement. From a practical perspective, the findings of the study hold implications for SMMEs, which should be considered to ensure that employees are thriving and engaged at work. By developing spiritual workplaces, SMMEs are likely to promote sustainable human performance, which has the potential to give them the competitive advantage they need, in an environment that is rife with competition and toxic behaviour.

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Competing interest

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

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