EXISTENTIALISM, SPIRITUALITY, AND WORK: TOWARD A PARADIGM OF AUTHENTICITY

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that existential philosophy offers particular insights into the individual and organizations that should be incorporated into the management, spirituality and religion discussion. The interest in spirituality and work is focusing attention on a major problem in the workplace - work which lacks meaning for many people. However, the relationship between meaning, work, and organizations is viewed from a number of varying perspectives. Existential philosophy offers a new paradigm, one that focuses the discussion on the creation of individual authenticity. This new paradigm has major implications for how we view work, organizations, and the development of society.

Keywords:
Spirituality, Management, Transformation

INTRODUCTION

The growing interest in management, spirituality and religion is focusing attention on the relationship between work, spirituality, and individual meaning, and stimulating debate on a major problem in the workplace, that is, a lack of meaning for the individual. Since work is for most people a significant component of life it has a major effect on the challenge of living a meaningful life.

> It is hard for many of us to separate our work from the rest of our being…we spend too much of our time at work or in work-related social and leisure activities for us to expect to continue trying to compartmentalize our lives into separate work, family, religious and social domains. As one result, the pressure many of us feel to recognize and respond to the sacred in us must find outlet in the secular workplace. If personal or social transformation is to take place, it will most likely take place at work. For, after all, life is about spirit and we humans carry only one spirit that must manifest itself in both life and livelihood. (Fairholm, 1996: 12)

According to many scholars personal meaning is one of the most important questions of our era. Belliotti (2001: 10) states, "reflecting on the meaning of life may be spurred by psychological crisis but it may also arise from an acute awareness that Henry David Thoreau was correct: most people do lead lives of quiet desperation… the human condition is unique in that we can evaluate and enhance our lives by confronting ultimate questions that resist simple resolutions...to renounce the quest is to close off an important sense of human meaning." Frankl (1959: 121) notes, "man's search for meaning is the primary motivation in his life and not a "secondary rationalization" of instinctual drives…this meaning is unique and specific in that it must and can be fulfilled by him alone; only then does it achieve a significance which will satisfy his own will to meaning."

However, personal meaning is complex and there are a variety of perspectives on the relationship between spirituality, meaning, and our work lives. Howard (2002: 240) notes, "the desire by many individuals to live lives which are compatible with the demands of their spirituality is insistent and requires attention by practitioners and academics alike...this sense of spirituality is provoking some far-reaching questions about the choices we make in our lives, including how we view our work." Despite a number of arguments for the incorporation of spirituality into the workplace, it is unclear what this means, and what a "spiritual workplace" or a "spiritual organization" would look like (Bell & Taylor, 2003; Butts, 1999; Garcia-Zamor, 2003; Howard, 2002; Ottaway, 2003).

> Even if we accept spirituality as central to our world philosophy, we are insufficient in our ability to understand this and to live with it. We might understand more of the mysteries of the universe and the different levels of reality that exist but we still have trouble connecting and applying this in our lives... spirituality provokes uncomfortable questions in us and may mean confronting pain. Deep reflection on one's life does not represent an easy option and that is why many people avoid it. (Howard, 2002: 238)

The field of management, spirituality and religion is in need of a paradigm that can bring together the various perspectives on meaning, spirituality, and work, and unite secular and non-secular views in the spirituality and work field. Existential philosophy can provide the basis for this new paradigm as it focuses on the individual and the creation of a meaningful or "authentic" life. Webster (2004: 7) states, "Spirituality is understood to involve an engagement with the

meaning of one's life, and Existential philosophy is founded upon the premise that human individuals have a concern for the meaning of their being."

Existential philosophy has previously been utilized as a means of understanding the individual under the context of human existence, most notably in the area of psychological counseling (Barnes, 1959; Bugental, 1965; May, 1968). Bugental (1965: 1) states, "An existential orientation to personality and psychotherapy recognizes the human existence as the central fact of existence, examines the vicissitudes of that experience in the perspective of the basic nature of being, and orients its growth-inducing efforts toward maximum accord with the whole of life." There have also been attempts to bring an existential perspective into the study of work and organizations, but only by a limited number of management scholars (Kelly & Kelly, 1998; Pauchant, 1993, 1995). This paper adds to the argument for the use of existential philosophy in work and organizational analysis, specifically using the concept of authenticity as the basis for a new paradigm. A paradigm of authenticity can unite the spirituality and work field and focus the discussion on the impact work and organizations have on the individual and his/her desire to live a meaningful life. Through this lens we view work and organizations primarily as a means of achieving authenticity.

The paper is divided into three sections. Firstly, I will outline the current problem with how we view and study meaning, work and organizations. Secondly, I will review existential philosophy, with a focus on the concept of authenticity. Thirdly, I will discuss some of the implications an authenticity paradigm would have on how we view work, organizations, and society.

THE PROBLEM

Work serves a variety of needs for people including economic, social, challenge, engagement, identity, and life fulfillment, and as a result it is a major part of what defines us as human beings (Karp & Yoels, 1981; Law, Meijers & Wijers, 2002; Moen, 1998; Mutlu & Asik, 2002). Gini (2000: ix) notes, "work is the most common experience of adult life...some love it, others hate it, but few of us are able to avoid it...because we spend two-thirds of our waking life on the job, work is the way we come to know the world and are known to the world…work becomes our identity, our signature on the world…to work is to be and not to work is not to be." Mills and Simmons (1999: 114-115) state:

> …people do not leave their selves behind when they come to work. The workplace is charged with emotionality, family concerns, sexuality, worries, hopes and dreams: try as they may, persons cannot divorce their selves from the workplace. Organizations are composed of persons with diverse psychological needs and behaviours which inevitably come to influence, and are shaped by, working relationships.

Unfortunately, many of today's organizations are described as "toxic environments" with a variety of problems for employees: high levels of stress, depression, feelings of being treated unfairly, bullying, low productivity, high absenteeism, turnover, and work-related health problems (Browne, 2002; Gini, 2000; Jamal & Baba, 2000; Kimura, 2003; Lane, 1993; Leiter & Maslach, 2001; Lerner, Levine, Malspeis & D'Agostino, 1994). Providing a positive environment and a meaningful experience for the individual is generally a secondary consideration for the average organization to the primary goal of profit maximization. Many researchers argue that the emphasis on the maximization of profit has resulted in organizations detrimental to meaningful existence (Bakan, 2004; Kimura, 2003). Bakan (2004: 159) argues that, "we have over the last three hundred years constructed a remarkably efficient wealth-creating machine, but it is now out of control." Many organizations provide a system of meaning that "may be misplaced,

manipulated cynically, and even destructive, and may engender myopia, resistance to change, existential disappointment, and a loss of individuality" (Ashforth & Vaidyanath, 2002: 368). Gini (2000: 199) comments that, "we have made work simultaneously compulsory and unsatisfactory…work isn't about what we want to do, but what others tell us to do." Lane (1993: 65) notes, "Market economies have made us prosperous, but they do not maximize "utility" or the satisfaction of human wants." Almost thirty years ago, Levinson (1978) noted the negative effects organizations had on the individual and questioned whether or not we were working toward creating the type of organization that was conducive to development.

> We are still learning how to create organizations that work productively, humanely and in ways that support the adult development of their employees and clients. The aims of productivity and profit making have had top priority in the industrial age that is now passing. As we move into an age in which production and power might be less overriding concerns, we have a chance to reorder our priorities. It remains to be seen whether we shall give higher priority to enhancing the meaning of work and to creating work organizations that foster development as well as productive efficiency. (Levinson, 1978: 338)

To address the problems of work and organizations a new and growing voice is the field of management, spirituality and religion (Bell & Taylor, 2003; Dalton, 2001; Elmes & Smith, 2001; Fox, 2003; Garcia-Zamor, 2003; Harrington, Preziosi & Gooden, 2001; Howard, 2002; Lavelle, 1999; Lips-Wiersma, 2002, 2002; McCormick, 1994; Mitroff & Denton, 1999; Ottaway, 2003; Tischler, 1999). Spirituality in the workplace is even being referred to as a new emerging paradigm for business (Ashar & Lane-Maher, 2004; Dhiman & King, 2005). It is argued that:

> …as a context for human development, work activities provide a venue for becoming more than one used to be. In and through work, individuals develop themselves by expressing the occupational interests, vocational talents, and work values that move them from a felt negative to the perceived plus. This progressive development constitutes a spiritual quest for meaning and self-completion that, in the process, helps people become someone they want to be, a person they themselves would like. (Savickas, 1994: 5)

However, there are a variety of perspectives on management, spirituality and religion, and there is no agreed upon vision for work and organizations or a common management/spirituality/ religion lens. Mitroff and Denton (1999: 83) define spirituality "as the basic feeling of being connected with one's complete self, others, and the entire universe." Ashmos and Duchon (2000: 137) define spirituality at work 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". Ottaway (2003: 34) describes spirituality in the workplace in terms of "a source of energy empowering and transforming the life of daily work…beyond the rational… creating a new order." Spirituality and work is regarded by some from a religious perspective, i.e., bringing religious beliefs into work practices, while others view it from a secular perspective (Harrington, Preziosi & Gooden, 2001; Marques, Dhiman & King, 2005). It has also been suggested that spirituality at work can be viewed as either spirituality *in work*, or spirituality *of work*. Spirituality in work "suggests that the two domains are separate but one can be exercised within the context of the other" and spirituality of work means that "work is a vehicle of transcendence" (Haroutiounian, Ghavan, Gomez, Ivshin, Phelan, Freshman, Griffin & Lindsay, 2000: 670-671).

It is understandable that there are a variety of perspectives on spirituality and work since it is dependent on individual beliefs about meaning, and, "whatever one's underlying belief

system, everyone has a spiritual life, just as they have an unconscious, whether they like it or not" (Howard, 2002: 234). Regardless of these different viewpoints, however, the common denominator in the spirituality and work movement is the emphasis on finding meaning, and it is in that goal that we might find unity.

> We each need to find meaning and purpose and develop our potential, to live an integrated life. Spirituality encompasses the way an individual lives out his or her sense of interconnectedness with the world through an ability to tap into deep resources. It encompasses such terms as truth, love, service, wisdom, joy, peace, and wholeness. It is about self-awareness and about unity with others. It combines our basic philosophy towards life, our values, with our conduct and practice. Hence the difficulty with definition – spirituality is both highly individual and intensely personal, as well as inclusive and universal. (Howard, 2002: 231)

Despite the many perspectives and lack of consensus, the management, spirituality and religion field is focusing attention on a major problem in the workplace: work which lacks meaning for many people. Pfeffer (1998: 112) notes, "people work for money – but they work even more for meaning in their lives." Harrington, Preziosi & Gooden (2001) comment that spirituality and work "is about experiencing real purpose and meaning in their work beyond paychecks and task performance" (155), and that, "workers now desire a stronger integration of their spiritual values with their work and leaders will be forced to respond by accommodating the transformation of a more humanistic workplace where spiritual principles and values become integral parts of the organization's culture" (162).

The problem of living a meaningful life, especially related to work, has been an issue of society for decades.

> The clearest picture of the empty life is the suburban man, who gets up at the same hour every weekday morning, takes the same train to work in the city, performs the same task in the office, lunches at the same place, leaves the same tip for the waitress each day, comes home on the same train each night, has 2.3 children, cultivates a little garden, spends a two-week vacation at the shore every summer which he does not enjoy, goes to church every Christmas and Easter, and moves through a routine, mechanical existence year after year until he finally retires at sixty-five and very soon thereafter dies of heart failure, possibly brought on by repressed hostility. (May, 1953: 21)

It would seem that little has changed since May's description of the typical life in 1953. Fromm (1976: 5) notes, "we are a society of notoriously unhappy people: lonely, anxious, depressed, destructive, dependent – people who are glad when we have killed the time we are trying to save." We have become accustomed to a rather mundane existence, resulting in a loss of self but we still long for a different existence (Gaarder, 1994: 15). Therefore, despite unparalleled technological and material progress, finding meaning is difficult especially when it comes to work.

Adding to the challenge of living a meaningful life is our current Western society. Despite apparent progress and advances in many areas, e.g., medical, technology, and standard of living, well-being and happiness levels have decreased, while anxiety, depression, use of medication, and suicide levels have increased (Easterbrook, 2003). And, personal meaning has increasingly become attached to consumption and material gain, i.e., the more I own, the more meaningful my life (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999; Easterbrook, 2003; Fromm, 1976; Wattanasuwan, 2005). Csikszentmihalyi (1999: 823) states, "Dependence on material goals is so difficult to avoid in

part because our culture has progressively eliminated every alternative that in previous times used to give meaning and purpose to individual lives." Fairholm (1996) relates this to the diminished role of religion and comments that "for most of human history no one had to search for the spiritual in their lives…at the core of every culture was a religion, with sacred times and places set aside for public rituals...for many these holy places are less and less familiar today" (17).

> Perhaps because the heyday of utilitarian philosophy coincided with the start of the enormous forward strides in public health and in the manufacturing and distribution of goods, the majority of those who thought about such things assumed that increases in pleasure and happiness would come from increased affluence, from greater control over the material environment. The great self-confidence of the Western technological nations, and especially of the United States, was in large part because of the belief that materialism – the prolongation of a healthy life, the acquisition of wealth, the ownership of consumer goods – would be the royal road to a happy life. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999: 822)

However, it should be obvious to us by now that a life spent in the pursuit of materialism is a shallow life based on superficial meaning. An emphasis on monetary values above all else, "renders us increasingly insensible to the inherent qualities of life and to the real beauty and giftedness of being" (Gay, 2004: 17), and a continuing trend toward materialism paints a bleak picture for the future of humanity. Greening (1971: 9) states, "self-actualization tendencies must compete with many other tendencies as man proceeds to make his own nature…conceivably, man may evolve in such a way as to lose his self-actualization drive and diminish his potential."

Many people have now reached a "boiling" point with their lack of meaning and hunger for a more fulfilling experience, especially as it pertains to their work life (King & Nichol, 1999; Herman & Gioia, 1998; Neck & Millman, 1994; White, 2001).

> Today's worker is no longer willing to work in an authoritarian and dehumanizing environment. Workers want meaning in their work and balance in their lives. Given the amount of time people spend at work, they want opportunities to contribute and to know how their work contributes to the organization. They also want to be valued as individuals with goals and aspirations, not just replaceable drones in the hive (Herman & Gioia, 1998: 24).

Cacloppe (2000: 1) comments, "We are at a time in history when we need to revise our entire view of ourselves, the nature of work and leadership of organizations." The tragic events of 9-11 have also had an effect and resulted in many people re-evaluating their lives and their work, as they search for a deeper meaning in life beyond career success (Cannon, 2002; Garcia-Zamor, 2003; Howard, 2002; Wrzesniewski, 2002). Butts (1999: 329) notes "business owners, managers, policymakers, and academic researchers all need to remember, as many surveys indicate, that tens of millions of world citizens are hungering for transmaterial, mind-expanding, soul-enriching, and heart-centred (spiritual) values."

> The workforce in corporate America is about to explode. For years, external forces, such as technological advances and market demand shifts, have driven organization change and direction. To sustain an organization, leaders and consultants develop change initiatives often without including the very people who will be charged with implementing them. Within the past decade, a fuse has been gradually and steadily burning from the inside of the organization…from its people. The burning fuse has been unstable work environments too concerned with advancement and survival to lend support to two basic human needs of employees: to build meaning in an employee's own life through their work and to

> cultivate an environment that encourages the growth of the human spirit. (White, 2001: 47)

The problem, therefore, with how we currently view and study meaning, work and organizations is three-fold: (1) the current nature of the organization can work against the creation of individual meaning; (2) the relationship between management, spirituality and religion is not clear and viewed from many perspectives, and; (3) society encourages only a superficial level of meaning connected to career success and materialism. We turn now to the philosophy of existentialism to provide us with new insights into the individual and, therefore, new directions for management, spirituality and religion.

EXISTENTIAL PHILOSOPHY - AUTHENTICITY

Existential philosophy is a multi-faceted view of the nature of individual "Being", and as such, is made up of many varying perspectives (Breisach, 1962: Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Cotkin, 2003). Sartre (1970: 25-26) argued that, "the word is now so loosely applied to so many things that it no longer means anything at all." However, there is general agreement that Existential philosophy attempts to make sense of and provide answers to the circumstances and dilemma of the human condition. It has been described as an "endeavor to grasp reality [and] arises directly out of Western man's anxiety, estrangement, and conflicts" (May, 1959: 19). It attempts "to be responsive to the predicament of modern man and to supply an interpretation of his anguish and aspirations" (Collins, 1952: 3). Existential thought provides a direction for humanity, as it highlights the possibilities of human existence and what can be for individual life. Sartre (1970: 24) states, "Existentialism, in our sense of the word, is a doctrine that does render human life possible…which affirms that every truth and every action imply both an environment and human subjectivity." Existential philosophy "attempts to understand how events in life fit into a larger context…involves the process of creating and discovering meaning, which is facilitated by a sense of coherence (order, reason for existence) and a sense of purpose (mission in life, direction)" (Reker & Chamberlain, 2000: 1). Breisach (1962: 4-5) notes, "Existentialists have asked for a life in which man continuously questions his purpose and accepts responsibility for his actions, one which truly reflects man's special position in this world."

Existentialism is rooted in nineteenth century Europe but it came into prominence shortly after the end of World War II when many were questioning the human condition.

> Existentialism, as a way of thinking about and depicting the world, emerged most strongly out of the tremors and that shook modern Europe beginning in the nineteenth century. The inhuman, alienating implications of modern capitalist production and warfare, the unfulfilled promise of science, the decline of religious certitude, the challenges issued by Darwin, Freud, and modern physics – all contributed to existentialism's claim to pertinence. Sartre and Heidegger expressed, in philosophical and literary terms, the essentials of existentialism. In so doing, they attempted to characterize aspects of the timeless nature of the human condition and to respond to the quickening pace of alienation and despair in their own era. (Cotkin, 2003: 3-4)

Kierkegaard is generally credited with being the father of Existentialism as he was the first to reject the emphasis on universalism in favor of a focus on the individual - "my listeners, do you at present live in such a way that you are yourself clearly and eternally conscious of being an individual?" (Kierkegaard, 1956: 195). However, many others have contributed to our knowledge of Existential philosophy – Socrates, Plato, Husserl, Heidegger, Nietzsche, Camus, Sartre, De Beauvoir, and Frankl, providing his/her own unique perspective (Collins, 1952;

Cotkin, 2003; MacDonald, 2001; Wahl, 1969). For the Existentialists, "philosophy is essentially the study of Being" (Wahl, 1969: 95). In effect, they challenge our beliefs and our conception of what it means to be 'human', with the goal to encourage humanity to seek out an 'authentic' existence.

> The existentialist writers hope to shatter our dogmatic beliefs and lure us into giving up blindly accepted ethical norms and ideologies. Only when we successfully shed these values that we have been conditioned to uphold by various institutions – our families, schools and universities – will we be able to reach beyond them to the genuine roots of our selves and ultimately attain authenticity. The unnecessary information we have collected during our lifetimes, the 'facts' postulated as an integral part of the ethos of objectivity fostered by society and its institutions, are inapplicable to the sphere of human existence in which one struggles for one's self. There, in their stead, the notion of authenticity emerges. (Golomb, 1995: 8)

Existentialism focuses on the individual, and the concepts of authenticity, freedom, choice, consciousness, and subjectivity (Barnes, 1959; Breisach, 1962; Sartre, 1956, 1970; Wahl, 1969). It is based on the premise that "existence precedes essence" - we are thrown into the world and simply exist, and our essence is created through the lives we choose to live. Sartre (1970: 28) comments, "what do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence…we mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards." Existential philosophy focuses on what it means to be human, i.e., the nature of "being." Bugental (1965: 27) defines "'be-ing' as a name for the process of self-aware existing."

For the individual, existential philosophy emphasizes the creation of meaningful or authentic life, and authenticity is unique to the individual. The starting point for authentic action is the recognition that the human self is "the true center of philosophy and . . . the sole legitimating authority" (Levine, 1984: 326). The individual must accept responsibility for his/her life and make living an authentic life a continual and never-ending goal. Golomb (1995: 10) notes, "though the term [authenticity] is indeed derived from *auctoritas*, the authority in question is self-directed – it is the mastery of one who freely creates the pathos of authenticity and strives to express and live it in the everyday." Centuries ago Socrates noted that a key problem of humanity was a lack of self-examination - "the unexamined life is not worth living." This can be interpreted as "the unexamined life is a wasted life," one which we sleepwalk through (Morris, 1999). Socrates argued that we must question who we are and what is important in our life, and that it is only through self-awareness that we then choose our lives and live a meaningful life (McClelland, 1951). Bugental (1965: 31-32) comments, "a person is authentic in that degree to which his being in the world is unqualifiedly in accord with the givenness of his own nature and of the world…authenticity is the primary good or value of the existential viewpoint."

An authentic life is possible only if we accept that the individual has freedom of choice. Sartre contends that the individual is "free as a conscious being to choose the meaning that s/he will give the facts in his/her situation" (Levine, 1984: 359). Sartre (1970: 41) states, "Man is nothing else but what he purposes, he exists only in so far as he realizes himself, he is therefore nothing else but the sum of his actions, nothing else but what his life is." Sartre said we are "condemned to be free", i.e., freedom brings choice and subsequent responsibility for our actions that perhaps we don't want. It may be easier to deal with life if we feel that we believe that we are not in control, and therefore cannot be totally responsible for our lives. Since we are free, everything we do is a choice, and we define ourselves through our choices. Our freedom gives us these choices, choices that result in the path that we follow, and ultimately in the life that we live,

i.e., authentic versus inauthentic. As conscious beings, individuals "cannot logically be regarded as causally determined by unconscious forces by antecedent psychological conditions" of his or her life (Levine, 1984: 358).

> The basic step in achieving inward freedom is "choosing one's self." This strange-sounding phrase of Kierkegaard's means to affirm one's responsibility for one's self and one's existence. It is the attitude which is opposite to blind momentum or routine existence: it is an attitude of aliveness and decisiveness; it means that one recognizes that he exists in his particular spot in the universe, and he accepts the responsibility for this existence. This is what Nietzsche meant by the "will to live" – not simply the instinct for self-preservation, but the will to accept the fact that one is one's self, and to accept responsibility for fulfilling one's own destiny, which in turn implies accepting the fact that one must make his basic choices himself. (May, 1953: 168-169)

However, the problem is that we are rarely conscious of this "being" process and tend to act in "bad faith", which means that the individual acts in accord with assigned definitions of self, taking neither full credit or blame for his or her actions. It is "an attempt to escape from . . . [individual] freedom by pretending that human affairs are unavoidable or necessary, as is the causal order of things" (Levine, 1984: 361). This is echoed by Barnes (1959: 48) who comments, "…man cannot bear the realization that all the values he lives by, his purposes, his projects are sustained by his own free choice; he finds it too great a strain to accept sole responsibility for his life. Therefore he takes refuge in the belief that somehow the external world is so structured that it guarantees the worth of its objects, it provides specific tasks which have to be done, it demands of each person a definite way of living which is the right one." Authenticity is based on how the individual views the world and his/her beliefs about meaning, and therefore, "each individual has to come to her own conclusions about authenticity" (Golomb, 1995: 200). Bugental (1965: 33) states, "authenticity is a term used to characterize a way of being in the world in which one's being is in harmony with the being of the world itself…we are inauthentic to the extent that we are in conflict with the givenness of being." The Authentic person recognizes that human existence is a mystery, and he/she ventures forward creating meaning as he/she journeys through life (Breisach, 1962).

Existential philosophy, then, provides compelling insights into the nature of human existence. In particular, it gives us a way to view individual meaning, i.e., the necessity of living an authentic life which must be defined by the individual. Authenticity, in relation to work, therefore, can lead to exploring how work can become more meaningful for the individual.

A PARADIGM OF AUTHENTICITY

A paradigm of authenticity for management, spirituality and religion would focus our attention on the nature of individual existence, because work and organizations would be viewed within the context of the creation of authentic life. Golomb (1995: 200) notes, "the existential question today is not whether to be or not to be, but how one can become what one truly is." This new paradigm has major implications for how we view work and careers, the issues with work many encounter during mid-life, the nature of organizations, and society.

An authenticity view starts with the question, "what is the effect of daily work on authentic life – does it contribute to or detract from the creation of authenticity?" All work is considered in its relationship to meaningful existence, and how it fits with the individual's definition of authentic life. Chalofsky (2003: 58) comments, "meaningful work isn't just about the meaning of the paid work we perform; it's about the way we live our lives...it's the alignment

of purpose, values, relationships, and activities that we pursue in life." All work cannot be made free of problems, but we can work toward ending the preformed self and the unquestioning acceptance of work lives, and where all individuals are "free" to make choices. Gini (2000: 224) notes, "Work will never be completely free of disappointment, drudgery, and toil, but all work should, at least, offer the possibility of purpose and hope." Individual beliefs about meaning and authenticity should be the critical factor for individual choices and therefore how authenticity is achieved. Baumeister (1991: 27) states, "people will act on the basis of how they interpret their own lives, circumstances, and activities." Only from an authenticity perspective can we make choices about our lives which result in added meaning rather than the opposite.

A paradigm of authenticity highlights the importance of the "conscious" life, and the need for the individual to choose work that aligns with his/her personal definition of an authentic existence. The challenge for all of us is to determine what an authentic life consists of and to fit our work within that framework of our existence. This means incorporating a longer term perspective into how work and careers are viewed and therefore chosen. Baumeister (1991: 3) comments, "Consideration of life's meaning requires stepping back from the moment and seeing events in a long-range context." Leider (1976: 20) notes, "by taking a longer view of your life – this avoiding short-term, "Band-aid" decisions – life/career planning helps deal with five basic questions: Who am I? Who's in charge of my life? What is the truth about the world of work? What do I want most to accomplish? How do I go about it?" Since work is for most people a significant component of their lives, it is important that decisions about careers are made in relation to the individual beliefs about meaning.

The meaning of work is dependent on how it is viewed by the individual and this viewpoint can change over time. What really matters is the relationship the work has on authenticity for that particular individual. This fits with Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler and Tipton's (1985) three-component theory of work as viewed as a job, a career or a calling. A job is work based solely on income, a career is for income plus a development path, and a calling is work that the individual would engage in even if they had no financial need, and at each level the personal investment increases (Bellah et al, 1985). Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin and Schwartz (1997) investigated Bellah et al's (1985) three component theory of work (job, career, or calling) and found considerable empirical support. They also found that it was not occupation dependent, i.e., within the same occupation you could find people who viewed the same work as a job, career or calling. The work itself does not necessarily matter, only how it is regarded by the individual. For example, one person may view cleaning as simply a job, while another may view it as a career, while another may relate it to serving the greater good, a calling. They note that "satisfaction with life and work may be more dependent on how an employee sees his or her work than on income or occupational prestige" (Wrzesniewski et al, 1997: 31). Lastly, they note that the same work can start as a career or even a calling but over time turn into just a job. The graduating university student may have great hopes to make being a lawyer an exciting career but twenty years later he/she may view it as being only a job.

A paradigm of authenticity can also help us understand the problems many people encounter with work in mid-life. We all go through stages of life and, "the nature of each era is reflected in the evolution of a man's careers in work, family and other settings, his involvement in solitary and social enterprises, and his broader life plans and goals" (Levinson, 1978: 30). It is natural for serious reflection to come with the period of life from age 35 to 45, the "mid-life decade" and that the "mid-life crisis" can be a very real event in a person's life. At this time a person, "is likely to review his progress and ask: What have I done? Where am I now? Of what value is my life to society, to other persons, and especially to myself? [and] he must deal with the

disparity between what he has dreamed of becoming" (Levinson, 1978: 30). The mid-life point is frequently a time when people experience a career plateau (Nachbagauer & Riedl, 2002). Many people during this period in their lives ponder the question "what am I doing with my life" (Cannon, 2002). It is then natural for people to change their expectations in their life prompting them to seek out mid-career renewal (Leider, 1976). The mid-life questioning can be viewed as a gap between "real" life and "authentic" life. If the individual feels his/her life is no longer or perhaps never was authentic, i.e., living in bad faith, then it is natural for him/her to experience anxiety and depression. Therefore, a paradigm of authenticity can help individuals understand that it may be natural (and desirable) to undergo career changes throughout life, as the authentic life is always a work in progress and continually being formed by the individual.

Through a paradigm of authenticity, organizations would be viewed in terms of their effect on individual authenticity. What the individual experiences in the workplace and the subsequent meanings that are attached to those experiences, can either contribute to or detract from authentic life. An emphasis on authenticity highlights the need for us to re-evaluate the nature of the organization, especially the goal of profit-maximization. Henning (1997: 35) argues, "profit, quality, cycle time, and market share are not the core points of work…work is about creating, sustaining, and enlarging the possibilities of life…this is why it has meaning." Many scholars argue, in fact, that creating is the core principle of authenticity.

> Most accounts of authenticity are modeled on the aesthetic ideal of creativity: spontaneous creation of one's self and life. Yet no creativity is possible without the social and cultural context that provides the raw material one uses – the conventions, ideas, and institutions against which one must struggle to fashion one's authentic self. Society provides the ethical norms and potential sources of self-identity that must freely and consciously be overcome, changed or assimilated into one's life if one is to become what one wants to be. (Golomb, 1995: 201)

Unfortunately, organizations can work against the goal of authentic life as they promote conformity through rule adherence and social belonging, both of which can have a detrimental effect on the individual. Pauchant (1995: 5) argues, "At a time when organizations are advocating the myth of team spirit for achieving greater effectiveness, the realization of loneliness is paramount because it allows one to understand that social belonging can become an escape from one's individuality."

Lastly, a focus on authenticity has implications for the development of society as it shifts the discussion to the creation of an "authentic" society. As previously noted, there are many problems with our current society and hence, the direction of our world. However, despite the condition of current society, many scholars are optimistic that we can change direction and move toward a different kind of world. Hubbard (2002: 359) states:

> The human species is facing a great transition from one stage of evolution to the next…*Homo sapiens* have gained unprecedented technological and social power to either destroy this world as we know it, or to co-create an immeasurable future…we stand at a threshold, and it has become clear that if we continue to use our new powers in the same state of consciousness in which we created them, we can wreak havoc upon ourselves and the other species of earth...but if we use our new powers wisely, we will transcend the current human condition, not only solving our problems but participating in the co-creation of futures that are chosen, open-ended and ever-evolving.

Hubbard calls for the conscious evolution of humanity which she defines as "the capacity to be aware of the process of evolution and to guide that process for the good of all Earth life" (Cornish & McGuinness, 1993: 39). Other scholars agree with Hubbard's assessment that we can determine the world's fate and argue for the need to re-evaluate what we deem to be "success."

> …we need to redefine the good life as it is equated with purchasing power. The dream of the home in the suburbs as fulfillment and success brings with it the fears of losing all that we have worked so hard to attain. We rightly have a sense of personal pride and accomplishment; however, this must be coupled with a real sense of connectedness to the world at large. In "making it," we must begin an exploration of the questions of integrity, human consequences, rootlessness, and salvation. How misguided is our identification of happiness, and how blind is our pursuit? (Natale & Neher, 1994: 240)

A focus on authenticity will result in an increased awareness of the current state of the world and likely lead to new choices with different societal outcomes. As existential philosophers argue, people do not just affect themselves when they make choices; they also affect others, and the society itself. "As our future becomes increasingly the object of our own selection, it is no longer possible to avoid the question of the kind of future we want...do we want a more equal distribution of income or a less equal distribution…do we want big business or little business…do we want labor unions or circumscribed labor unions…do we want inflation or deflation…all these choices – and many others – lie within our own control" Heilbroner, 1972: 319). An authenticity perspective will change the way we regard all of our institutions and hopefully lead to changes that will in turn affect the direction our world takes in the 21st century. Hopefully we will consciously move toward a world where all people are considered equal, poverty and conflict anywhere is not acceptable, and individual life is focused on meaningful or authentic existence and the betterment of society.

CONCLUSION

Existential philosophy provides insights into individual existence and can be the basis for a new paradigm for the study of work and organizations, one where the focus is individual authenticity. A paradigm of authenticity can unite spirituality and work scholars, provide a new way of viewing work and organizations, and elevate the discussion of individual meaning to the evolution of humanity. Since we are continually creating our concepts of work, organizations and society, they all need to be viewed within the overall context of human existence and what it means to live an authentic life.

First of all, we need to stop viewing work and organizations from a mainly utilitarian perspective, blindly accepting the current nature of work and the organization. Work must be considered based on its effect on the individual life. Organizations need to be viewed as a tool for humanity, serving the individual and not as just a profit-making machine for a few. Forty years ago Bugental (1965: 403) stated, "In a society of Emergent Man the social institutions with which we are familiar – education, religion, government, business, science, the arts, entertainment, the healing arts, the military, would certainly be materially revised in every instance...I cannot think of one that would survive unchanged…this is not really surprising if we think of institutions as the instruments of common human purposes." Unfortunately, we are still waiting for this change to take place. We also need to move away from the emphasis on materialism and comfort, and instead focus on what it means to be human. We must focus on "being" and on how individuals attempt to create the authentic life. The challenge is for people to be more aware of the role of work in their lives and where it fits within their personal definition of a "meaningful existence."

People need to understand that work can be viewed in different ways in relation to their life and that this can change throughout the adult lifecycle. There is a need for courses in "meaningful living", i.e., authentic life, and work in higher education and training for career counselors so that when providing advice to clients, they can discuss how the individual views the role of work in his/her life. The main purpose is to help people understand how they view work so that they can make good career/life decisions. We need to help people determine what is meaningful to them as they consider paths in life and education and work opportunities. We must encourage them to ask, "What is this life I am living?" It is time to raise our sights both for ourselves as individuals and for the future of humanity and our planet.

In summary, a paradigm of authenticity for management, spirituality and religion would: (1) emphasize the goal of individual authenticity; (2) view work and organizations as primarily a vehicle for authenticity, and; (3) focus on an evolving world based on an authentic society. I believe that our current situation has reached the point where it is now time to shift our emphasis to the nature of the individual quest: to make sense of this world through the lives we choose to lead and through living an authentic life. A paradigm of authenticity does not provide us with all the answers but it does provide the right context and hence the right questions that need to be addressed.

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