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Appreciation: a spiritual path to finding value and meaning in the workplace

N.S. Fagley\textsuperscript{a*} and Mitchel G. Adler\textsuperscript{b}

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Appreciation is keenly connected to spirituality through a process of reciprocal causality, and both appear to be key factors in psychological and physical well-being and successful performance in the workplace, with each making a distinct contribution. Appreciation fosters well-being and success directly, as well as indirectly, through forging and maintaining social bonds, promoting better sleep, encouraging helping and building trust. Appreciation is viewed as having eight aspects: a focus on what one has (“Have” focus), awe, ritual, present moment, self/social comparison, gratitude, loss/adversity and interpersonal appreciation. Although interventions to increase several aspects of appreciation have been successful, they have not been intended for, or implemented formally in the workplace. This paper briefly reviews research on appreciation, suggests possible applications to the workplace, argues that appreciation is an important factor in workplace well-being and success, and urges researchers to pursue this line of investigation. We also argue that although spirituality and appreciation have many points of commonality and are likely involved in a process of reciprocal causality, it is most productive for research endeavors at this point to view them as distinct constructs. Research is needed to determine the most effective ways to express appreciation in the workplace and the most effective organizational and individual workplace interventions to foster appreciation and manifest spirituality. Appreciation may help employees feel valued, unleashing their intrinsic motivation and desire to excel and to help others, including customers, supervisors or peers. This would be good for them and for their employer. At the systems level, what organizational structures, procedures and practices promote spirituality and appreciation, which then foster important organizational outcomes? And finally, research is needed to assess the joint and unique effects of appreciation and spirituality on business outcomes, at the individual employee level and at the levels of the work team, unit and overall company.

**Keywords:** appreciation; gratitude; awe; spirituality; workplace; present moment; thankful

Some people focus on the positive aspects of their lives and the blessings that have come their way and are thankful. Others seem only to notice what they lack.

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and are bitter and resentful. Some people notice and value the help others offer, while others exhibit a sense of entitlement. That is, there are individual differences in appreciation, and we argue that appreciation is a key factor in performance and well-being across a number of life domains (e.g. work, family and community). Appreciation is defined as “acknowledging the value and meaning of something – an event, a person, a behavior, an object – and feeling a positive emotional connection to it” (Adler and Fagley 2005, p. 81). According to this definition, appreciation involves both cognition and affect. Further, appreciation has both trait and state components (Adler and Fagley 2005). People are believed to exhibit relatively enduring individual differences in appreciation (trait) and yet people can exhibit moment-to-moment differences in appreciation (state). That is, even someone who is relatively unappreciative can have a moment of appreciation. Similarly, someone who is generally appreciative can have a moment of unappreciativeness or ingratitude (Adler and Fagley 2005). In addition, even though people differ in their general tendency to experience appreciation, we believe that people can learn to experience and express more appreciation with relevant education, training and/or life experience. In essence, we posit that appreciation can be taught and learned. Further, we argue that it is a key factor affecting success in the workplace.

Appreciation fosters well-being, both directly and indirectly through its role in fostering other outcomes that promote well-being such as increases in spirituality or improved social relationships (see, e.g. Algoe et al. 2010). Research has shown that appreciation forges and maintains social connections, promotes good quality sleep and encourages helping and interpersonal trust (e.g. Schneider 2001, Dunn and Schweitzer 2005, Bartlett and DeSteno 2006, Wood et al. 2009, Algoe et al. 2010). These are important factors in the workplace, especially given the need for employees to work more collaboratively in teams and to support one another on group tasks. As organizations strive to be more flexible and dynamic to adjust and adapt quickly to changing needs in the information age, appreciation for one another is essential for effective performance. When individuals and work teams feel appreciated and supported, they are likely to feel more deeply connected to the organization as a whole, leading to a more spiritual connection to something beyond themselves. In addition, there is some evidence that altruistic behaviors spread to others beyond those initially involved. For instance, research has documented that the original beneficiary of help is more likely to help others, thereby spreading the cycle of support throughout the organization (e.g. Bartlett and DeSteno 2006). These factors make appreciation important in people’s personal lives, and also make appreciation important for an effective, healthy workplace. As work teams in organizations demonstrate appreciation for one another and their workplace, their collaborative efforts may be contagious.

The relation between appreciation and spirituality

Spirituality has been defined in many different ways, and little consensus has been achieved (Ashmos and Duchon 2000, Ashforth and Pratt 2003). For
example, Karakas (2010, p. 91) defined it as “the journey to find a sustainable, authentic, meaningful, holistic, and profound understanding of the existential self and its relationship/interconnectedness with the sacred and the transcendent”. Paragament and Mahoney (2009, p. 612) defined it as a “search for the sacred”. According to Koenig (2008), the “traditional-historical” view of spirituality is that it is a characteristic of “a subset of deeply religious people who have dedicated their lives to the service of their religion and to their fellow human[s], and whose lives exemplify the teachings of their faith traditions” (p. 349). He also argued that the view of spirituality has changed, with the definition of spirituality broadening to include people who are not religious and, in some definitions, to incorporate positive mental health constructs and even the secular, so that according to that view everyone has elements of spirituality in them. As the definitions of spirituality vary considerably, its relation to appreciation will differ depending on one’s definition. We view appreciation and spirituality as showing reciprocal causality. That is, appreciation may be both a cause and an effect of spirituality. Appreciation can be viewed as an expression of spirituality, that is, an “effect”. On the other hand, several aspects of appreciation, such as awe, promote the development of spirituality. So although we view these constructs as distinct, they are keenly connected.

Based on their work with trauma survivors, Janoff-Bulman and Berger (2000) argued that experiencing trauma often causes increased appreciation in the survivors. According to Janoff-Bulman and Berger (2000, p. 39) “A sense of appreciation enables us to discover what’s valuable – in fact to create value – where others might not even notice it. It enriches people’s lives …”. They argued that appreciation fosters the creation of meaning, which is a key part of many definitions of spirituality (Karakas 2010). This intimately connects appreciation to spirituality.

People have an intuitive grasp of the phenomenon described by Janoff-Bulman and Berger (2000) through their own experience, such as when they better appreciate their health when they become ill or appreciate their job when they watch others lose theirs. Appreciation can bring people into deep, meaningful contact with what matters most to them, which seems to be a key element of a spiritually rich life. A deeper connection to one’s values and beliefs stimulates one’s sense of meaning and purpose, which makes life worth living.

To some people, appreciation may be seen as synonymous with spirituality. They view an attitude of appreciation as an expression of spirituality. As suggested earlier, we take a somewhat different view of the relation between appreciation and spirituality. We posit a reciprocal relationship between appreciation and spirituality. In this view, some aspects of appreciation, such as awe, present moment, gratitude and interpersonal appreciation, are believed to foster the development of spirituality. But spirituality may also lead to greater appreciation (Tepper 2003). Appreciation can be an expression of a spiritual life. For example, Tepper (2003) argued that spiritual people are more likely to imbue ordinary experiences with meaning and hence experience gratefulness (an aspect of appreciation) which, in the workplace, would be expressed through engaging in
organizational citizenship behaviors. So in this view, spirituality leads to gratitude, which leads to positive work behaviors. One avenue for future research would be to examine the complex causal relations hypothesized between spirituality and appreciation, both in and out of the workplace.

Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003) noted that some people are uncomfortable addressing spirituality in the workplace. They noted that people sometimes express concerns about freedom of religion and that addressing spirituality in the workplace will lead to the imposition of the boss’s particular religious beliefs on employees. This is a valid concern. However, we agree with Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003) that it is possible to address spirituality, matters of the human spirit (e.g. values, beliefs, meaning and purpose), in the workplace without coming into conflict with people’s freedom of religion because fundamentally the goal is to foster the personal development of one’s employees. In this case, spirituality can exist without a concept of religion being involved. When employees have identified and developed their sense of meaning in their work and their talents, they will be more effective in the workplace. We believe that appreciation can provide a potentially valuable language for addressing spiritual issues in the workplace. That is, by using language that is not associated with religion, the content may be less threatening and more acceptable to people. For example, an employer could talk about trying to foster helping among employees, using one’s strengths and expressing appreciation to peers and supervisees, without triggering concern about management imposing religious practices or trying to promote a particular religion.

Adler (2002) developed a model of subjective well-being in which appreciation was a key contributor to subjective well-being (i.e. life satisfaction and positive affect), along with optimism and spirituality. Adler and Fagley (2005) found that appreciation was significantly correlated with life satisfaction and positive affect, even when optimism, emotional self-awareness and spirituality were controlled statistically. In addition to increasing understanding of factors related to life satisfaction and positive affect, this finding helps further our understanding of the relationship between spirituality and appreciation. Adler and Fagley (2005) reported that the correlation between spirituality and overall appreciation was .48 ($p < .001$), indicating a strong linear relation between these constructs. They share 23% of their variance, or about 1/4 of the variance in appreciation scores is explained by differences in spirituality and vice versa. This shows that although they have a notable degree of overlap or commonality, they are best viewed as distinct constructs. Even when the contribution of spirituality is partialled out, appreciation still makes a significant, unique contribution to life satisfaction and to positive effect, over and above that of spirituality, and vice versa in the case of life satisfaction.

Cacioppo et al. (2005, p. 144) argued that “sociality may serve as a model for spirituality, as when people form a personal relationship with a deity”. As appreciation (especially gratitude and interpersonal appreciation) promotes social relationships, and social relationships form the basis for learning how to relate to a deity, then this describes a causal chain connecting appreciation to spirituality.
Furthermore, the awe and present moment aspects of appreciation also nurture the development of transcendence and spirituality. Fuller (2006) argued that wonder is a gateway experience for “belief in something ‘more’ than ordinary reality” (p. 68). So experiences of awe and wonder may be precursors of spiritual experience and belief. On the other hand, spirituality promotes appreciation of life, of others, and a focus on the present moment, connecting spirituality to appreciation. So reciprocal causality seems a plausible model of the relation between spirituality and appreciation. Nevertheless, preliminary research has demonstrated appreciation is significantly related to life satisfaction and positive affect, even when optimism and spirituality are controlled statistically (e.g. Adler and Fagley 2005). So although related fundamentally to spirituality, appreciation appears to offer additional explanatory power for our well-being.

This paper will briefly review theory and research on appreciation and suggest how it may be a pivotal construct in promoting employee well-being, performance and success in the workplace, that is, the flourishing of the human spirit at work.

Positive psychology as a context for considering appreciation in the workplace

Positive psychology, a recent movement in psychology, and its organizational cousin positive organizational scholarship (see Cameron et al. 2003) may provide a valuable perspective from which to examine appreciation and spirituality in the workplace. Positive psychology focuses on identifying factors that promote human flourishing and productivity, contribute to a meaningful and fulfilling life, and foster well-being (Gable and Haidt 2005). Employee well-being has been shown to be related to various business outcomes (e.g. Wright and Cropanzano (2000), or see the meta-analysis conducted by Lyubomirsky et al. 2005). In addition, greater well-being is associated with better physical health (Lyubomirsky et al. 2005) which should reduce absenteeism, tardiness, worker’s compensation grievances and health insurance costs. One basic assumption of positive psychology is that flourishing and optimal functioning are much more than the absence of distress or problems. Positive psychology takes the stance that, on a personal level, particular beliefs, practices or characteristics foster optimal functioning. Similarly, particular organizational principles, practices and characteristics may promote employee well-being, thereby positively affecting productivity and other meaningful business outcomes. We argue that when employees are feeling good about themselves, they have more to give to others. When they are feeling depleted and burned out, they are less able to function optimally. This seems related to the Yerkes–Dodson law (or stress–performance curve), which speaks to the optimal range of stress or arousal needed for maximal performance (Yerkes and Dodson 1908). Either more or less arousal will lead to poorer performance. When employee well-being is supported and stress can be healthfully regulated, it seems likely that their performance will also be closer to optimal.
Peterson (2006) identified three pillars of positive psychology: (a) positive subjective experiences (happiness, pleasure, gratification and fulfillment), (b) positive individual traits (strengths of character, talents, interests and values) and (c) positive institutions/organizations (families, schools, businesses, communities and societies) (p. 20). According to Peterson (2006, p. 20), “Positive institutions facilitate the development and display of positive traits, which in turn facilitate positive subjective experiences”. Positive subjective experiences are generally experiences of positive affect and meaning. Positive individual traits are dispositions or habits of behavior such as optimism, openness to experience, love of learning, appreciation, leadership and perseverance (Peterson and Park 2009). Positive institutions promote successful business outcomes by structuring the work environment to include contingent positive rewards, positive feedback and social recognition (Pryce-Jones 2010). In addition, Luthans and Youssef (2009) argued that four psychological characteristics of workers are key: self-efficacy, hope, optimism and resiliency. They also suggested that gratitude, which we view as an aspect of appreciation, might be important in leading to positive work outcomes in supervisees, and suggested that appreciation may lead to positive effects for the customers that organizations serve.

A workplace can be a psychologically healthy institution, fostering positive traits, behaviors and practices, and creating positive subjective experiences including meaning and fulfillment. The desire for meaning and purpose is a manifestation of spirituality (Giacalone and Jurkiewicz 2003). Dedication to something larger than oneself can give a person a sense of purpose and meaning in life. One’s job is well positioned to provide this larger purpose given the large amount of time many people spend at work. Some jobs are obvious in their serving of a higher purpose (e.g. medicine and firefighting). Yet, people in jobs besides medicine and fire fighting can be viewed as serving a higher purpose. Rushing (2009) offered the following example. People working for a company that makes disposable diapers can view their work as fostering healthy infant development because dry bottoms help babies sleep through the night, which promotes healthy development (as well as parents’ peace of mind). Adopting such a perspective can help employees develop a sense of purpose and see the value of their job. As employees are more invested in the core values of their work, they may become more invested in, and committed to, the organization for which they work. The act of finding positive value and meaning in the work one does is a form of appreciation, as well as spirituality. Karakas (2010) argues that spirituality fosters a deeper connection to something beyond oneself. Ashmos and Duchon (2000) argued that meaningful work was one of three components of spirituality at work. As we connect to the positive and meaningful aspects of our work, we are both appreciating it and building a spiritual connection to it.

Fostering spirituality in the workplace helps individuals appreciate more deeply the connections they have to themselves, others, their environment and the larger world. Appreciation fosters an affinity for the triple bottom line of people, planet and profit (Fry and Slocum 2008). Appreciative people are more
likely to be conscientious regarding their impact on the environment and the people the organization serves.

In addition to conceptualizing and describing positive institutions as one of the three pillars of positive psychology, another contribution of positive psychology has been the development of the values in action (VIA) classification of character strengths and an instrument to measure them (Peterson and Seligman 2004). The VIA provides a taxonomy of character strengths, which is organized conceptually into six domains: (a) wisdom and knowledge, (b) courage, (c) humanity, (d) justice, (e) temperance and (f) transcendence (Seligman et al. 2005). The sixth domain, transcendence, includes appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude and religiousness. According to Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003), workplace spirituality promotes the experience of transcendence through the work process. So this domain includes appreciation and spirituality, reinforcing the idea that there is a fundamental connection between these constructs.

The Gallup Organization has developed its own measure of strengths called the Strengthsfinder (Snyder and Lopez 2007). According to Hodges and Clifton (2004), programs to identify and leverage strengths have been shown to affect outcomes such as attendance and grades in academic contexts and employee engagement and productivity in business contexts. In a meta-analysis of findings from 36 companies, employee engagement was shown to be associated with customer satisfaction, reduced employee turnover and increased productivity and profit (Harter et al. 2002). The Gallup Organization has found that helping people identify their strengths and find ways to use their strengths daily at work has a significant impact on decreased absenteeism, increased productivity and decreased worker’s compensation grievances (Buckingham and Coffman 1999). In essence, by helping employees appreciate their strengths, that is to notice, acknowledge and connect with them in a positive way, they increase their chances of applying them to improve their functioning as employees.

Another important contribution within the realm of positive psychology is the development of the Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions (e.g. Fredrickson 1998), which argues that positive emotions broaden attentional focus and conceptual boundaries and build resources. Consistent with the Broaden-and-Build Theory, research has demonstrated that positive emotion fosters creative problem solving (e.g. Isen et al. 1987) and that it builds intellectual and social resources that can be called upon in times of need (e.g. Fredrickson et al. 2008). Too much negative affect can compromise executive decision-making leading to difficulty with problem solving and productivity (Siegel 1999, Heilman et al. 2010). When employees are able to regulate their emotional states more effectively, their decision-making skills improve. These functions of positive emotion can be leveraged in the workplace to enhance worker creativity, problem solving, productivity and job satisfaction. Fredrickson (2004) argued that gratitude, viewed here as an aspect of appreciation, builds social bonds and fosters creative thinking about how to repay benefactors. Fredrickson (2004) also noted that positive emotion spreads (see, e.g. Fowler and Christakis 2008), and she argued that the positive emotion of
leaders in organizations or communities is even more likely to spread. We view appreciation within the context of the Broaden-and-Build Theory as a positive emotion that is especially important in building and maintaining social connections (see, e.g. Algoe et al. 2010) and fostering other positive emotions, which Lyubomirsky et al. (2005) have found to be associated with better work outcomes. Furthermore, as many organizations involve work in teams, working well with others is especially important (West et al. 2009). As appreciation helps to build and maintain social bonds, it is expected to promote effective collaboration and teamwork. Teams serve as small communities within organizations. As team members learn to appreciate themselves as a group and as part of a larger organization with values that match their own, they foster a spiritual connection to multiple levels beyond just themselves (e.g. peers, supervisors, the organization and those whom they serve).

The importance of positive emotions in the workplace is generally under-valued. However, over the last decade, interest has been increasing regarding the influence of positive emotions on cognition, especially decision-making and problem solving (Isen 2001). Isen (2001) argued that the positive affect of employees may be an especially important factor in customer satisfaction. At this point, it is unclear whether the effect on customer satisfaction may be due to the employees’ increased ability to solve problems, make good decisions or to the increased quality of the social connections between employees and customers, or to all of these factors. Greater positive affect expressed by employees may be even more important for older adults because they appear to be attuned differentially to positive affect (Carstensen and Mikels 2005). More recently, Lyubomirsky et al. (2005) conducted a meta-analysis of research on the relation between happiness and success, including job success, as measured by supervisor evaluations, quarterly insurance commissions, judged customer service and organizational citizenship behaviors, among others. They concluded that, although there is evidence of reciprocal causality, happiness precedes success and that the apparent causal factor is the positive affect. That is, they concluded that although success does tend to make people happy, there is evidence that happiness causes success. Adler and Fagley (2005) found that appreciation makes a significant unique contribution to how happy and satisfied people are in their lives. It seems worthwhile to continue investigating how appreciation in the workplace fosters success.

Although we cannot provide an exhaustive review of positive psychology research or research focused on the interaction of emotion and cognition, we hope this article will encourage further research into the influence of appreciation and spirituality in the workplace.

The eight aspects of appreciation
Appreciation is conceptualized as multifaceted. Eight aspects of appreciation have been defined (see Table 1), and their names spell out the acronym HARPS-GLI (Adler and Fagley 2005). The first aspect of appreciation is a
focus on what one has rather than on what one lacks (“Have” focus), such as a stable job during a recession. The next is experiencing a feeling of awe or wonder, a sense of transcendent connection, to nature, beauty or life itself (awe). A sense of wonder in the workplace can fuel the curiosity needed in some types of jobs, from forensics, to industrial R&D, to teaching. Many would include awe or wonder as a component of spirituality; according to Fuller (2006, p. 1) “wonder is a principal source of spirituality”. The third aspect of appreciation is engaging in rituals to foster appreciation, such as giving thanks for one’s food prior to eating or reflecting on one’s blessings at the close of each workday (ritual). The fourth aspect of appreciation is focusing on the present moment, engaging in mindful awareness, such as being fully present and attuned when a supervisee shares a success story about work accomplished (present moment). Living in the present is listed as a manifestation of spirituality by Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003) indicating another area of overlap between appreciation and spirituality. The fifth aspect of appreciation is engaging in self or social comparison to promote appreciating one’s blessings (self/social comparison). The sixth aspect of appreciation is gratitude – feeling grateful to someone, such as a receptionist, boss or colleague, for benefits received or help provided (gratitude). It should be noted that sometimes researchers deviate from the definition of gratitude as feeling grateful to someone for benefits received and instead use the term gratitude to refer to the higher-order construct that we call appreciation. However, we believe that it is valuable to use different terminology for the super-ordinate construct of appreciation. Lambert et al. (2009) also noted this conceptual confusion, although they suggested the term generalized gratitude to refer to the super-ordinate construct. The seventh aspect of appreciation is using experiences of loss or adversity to promote appreciation of the positive aspects of one’s life (loss/adversity). For those scoring high in the loss/adversity aspect of appreciation, experiences of loss imbue previously ordinary aspects of life with increased value and meaning. The unexpected loss of a job might promote greater

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Have” focus</td>
<td>A focus on what one has rather than lacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awe</td>
<td>Experiencing a feeling of awe/wonder, a sense of transcendent connection, to nature, beauty, or life itself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ritual</td>
<td>Engaging in rituals to foster appreciation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present moment</td>
<td>Focusing on the present moment, engaging in mindful awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self/social comparison</td>
<td>Engaging in self or social comparison to promote appreciating one’s blessings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gratitude</td>
<td>Feeling grateful to someone for benefits received</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss/adversity</td>
<td>Using experiences of loss or adversity to promote appreciation of the positive aspects of one’s life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
<td>Cherishing, valuing, and appreciating one’s relationships with others and expressing that appreciation to them</td>
</tr>
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Table 1. The eight aspects of appreciation: HARPS-GLI.
appreciation of one’s next job. Or a period of no raises may cause one to appreciate more one’s past and future raises. If one loses a sales account, one might be more focused and attentive to the remaining sales accounts one has. The eighth aspect of appreciation is interpersonal in which one cherishes, values and appreciates one’s relationships with others and expresses that appreciation to them (interpersonal). This might be acknowledging co-workers’ positive contributions to a team project or letting one’s boss know one feels supported. Although all represent aspects of the construct of appreciation, the eight aspects vary in their relation to key outcomes of interest such as workplace productivity, turnover or innovation (see, e.g. Adler and Fagley 2005). Furthermore, as we suggested earlier, some are more directly related to spirituality.

Research on the aspects of appreciation
Tucker (2007) replicated the findings of Adler and Fagley (2005) regarding the relationship between appreciation and life satisfaction and positive affect, and also found that appreciation was correlated with happiness and reward sensitivity. Few other studies have focused on overall/global appreciation. Although the construct of appreciation is viewed as having eight aspects, most of the empirical research to date has focused on the gratitude aspect, although research on mindfulness (what we call present moment) and awe is increasing (see, e.g. Brown and Ryan 2003 or Shiota et al. 2007). We believe these aspects of appreciation may have the closest connection to spirituality. Fuller (2006) noted that many religious rituals are intended to induce awe and wonder, so in that case, awe could be viewed as an effect of spirituality. But Fuller (2006) also viewed it as having a causal connection in the other direction, and we agree. That is, we argue that experiences of awe and/or wonder can lead to the development of greater spirituality. “Recurring experiences of wonder provide an experiential template for belief in something ‘more’ than ordinary reality” (Fuller 2006, p. 68). Shiota et al. (2007) found that awe typically involves a sense of vastness and self-diminishment. They also found that awe was associated with “increased emphasis on membership in ‘universal’ categories in participants’ self-concepts” (p. 944). Similarly, according to Bryant and Veroff (2007) three kinds of savoring, which is very close to our view of appreciation, can engage “spiritual connections to something outside oneself” (p. 193): thanksgiving, marveling and surrendering oneself to a person or group. This underscores the relation between appreciation processes such as thanksgiving and spirituality. One example offered by Bryant and Veroff is “being in awe of the grandeur of nature” (p. 193). Keltner and Haidt (2003) defined awe as an emotional response to vast stimuli that require modification of our cognitive schema. Therefore, experiences of awe are believed to represent a spiritual connection to the divine (Keltner and Haidt 2003). In the workplace, awe might arise out of an unanticipated collaboration on a project that revealed more success than one could have ever imagined alone. We sometimes
experience this in a brainstorming exercise where members discover ideas via associations from others’ ideas that they could never have imagined alone.

The present moment aspect of appreciation is consistent with some views of mindfulness. Mindfulness is defined as being “attentive to and aware of what is taking place in the present” (Brown and Ryan 2003, p. 822) or as “purposefully and nonjudgmentally paying attention to the present moment” (Giluk 2009, p. 805). This focus on the here-and-now is central to the present moment aspect of appreciation, and living in the moment was listed as a manifestation of spirituality by Gialalone and Jurkiewicz (2003, p. 14), which points to the connection between spirituality and appreciation. Further, mindfulness “has its roots in Buddhist and other contemplative traditions” (Brown and Ryan 2003, p. 822), so it appears connected to the development and expression of spirituality. Research has demonstrated that mindfulness is associated with greater well-being, which is consistent with the idea that the present moment aspect of appreciation influences well-being. Marianetti and Passmore (2010) argued that cues to remind people to be mindful and focus on the present can be implemented easily in the workplace. They suggested several cues one could use including the act of logging into one’s workstation/computer or strategically positioned post-it notes such as on one’s office clock. Seeing these cues can then trigger renewed mindfulness. Brown and Ryan (2003) demonstrated that increases in mindfulness were associated with decreased mood disturbance and stress. Brown and Ryan (2003, study 4) also showed that mindfulness was correlated with higher levels of daily autonomy and lower levels of unpleasant affect. In study 1, Brown and Ryan (2003), found that mindfulness was related to greater optimism, self-esteem, positive affect, life satisfaction, vitality, competence and physical well-being (as indicated by fewer doctor visits and physical symptoms). Howell et al. (2010) also found that mindfulness predicted well-being, both directly and indirectly through self-regulation of sleep. As employees learn to foster more mindfulness in the workplace they are more likely to manage their stress and emotions more effectively, thereby improving their likelihood of success at work. In addition, the increased positive affect generated through mindfulness would be expected to increase problem solving and creativity at work, as suggested by Fredrickson’s (1998) research on positive affect and the Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotion. Finally, mindfulness has the potential to regulate one’s emotional state more effectively, thereby integrating better with executive functioning, which helps with improved decision-making (Siegel 2007).

Gratitude has also been shown to be related to greater perceived sleep quality and sleep duration (Wood et al. 2009). Gratitude also predicted less sleep latency and daytime dysfunction. These relations were mediated by more positive pre-sleep cognitions and fewer negative pre-sleep cognitions. Greater emotional and physical well-being would likely enhance workplace effectiveness. And increased sleep quality should increase job safety and reduce on-the-job accidents, as well as enhance effective problem solving. A well-rested workforce
would likely have many benefits for an organization from improved decision-making to reduced health care issues.

One technique for increasing one’s appreciation for what one has is to ask people to list up to five things for which they are grateful or thankful (see, e.g. Emmons and McCullough 2003). This represents the “Have” focus aspect of appreciation, which is positively correlated with subjective well-being (Adler and Fagley 2005). See Lambert et al. (2009) for a similar view regarding the five blessings intervention.

To date, to the best of our knowledge, no one has examined this type of intervention in the workplace. Is there a way to include a task such as “list 3 things you’re grateful for or appreciate in your job” in conjunction with requests for feedback/suggestions about ways to improve productivity that many businesses use? Would routine inclusion of this task on a bi-weekly basis have a positive effect on important employee and/or business outcomes such as job satisfaction or productivity?

Watkins et al. (2003) examined the effect of thinking about, writing an essay about, or writing a letter to “someone for whom they were grateful”. According to our definitions, these activities involve interpersonal appreciation (being grateful for someone), rather than gratitude (being grateful to someone).1

Thinking about someone for whom one was grateful was associated with the greatest increase in positive affect. That is, they found that interpersonal appreciation interventions improved mood. So interpersonal appreciation could increase creative problem solving by increasing positive emotion. McCraty et al. (1995) also examined interpersonal appreciation and demonstrated that feeling appreciation toward someone for 5 min had a positive effect on cardiac functioning. Interpersonal appreciation may be a key factor to undoing the effects of stress on the heart (McCraty and Childre 2004).

The role of scarcity in appreciation
Janoff-Bulman and Berger (2000) noted that scarcity seems to prompt increases in appreciation. It is a principle from economics that scarcity increases value. But it may surprise some people to learn that it appears to apply to nonmonetary domains as well. Knowing that life is limited, increases its perceived value. This has formed the basis of some recent interventions to enhance appreciation. For example, Miller (2003) demonstrated that imagining the death of one’s healthy romantic partner, increased relationship satisfaction. This can be viewed as involving the loss/adversity aspect of appreciation. The imagined loss prompts a change in one’s perception of value, increasing interpersonal appreciation. This principle could be applied in the workplace by imagining what one’s life might be like without a job, which would be expected to increase one’s appreciation for it, especially if the job has become routine. This could lead to a shift in perception and re-engagement in one’s work. However, if one’s job is actually at risk, then imagining life without it would likely result in increased anxiety and distress rather than increased
appreciation. Also, it seems unlikely to have the desired effect if it is one’s boss who suggests one should feel “lucky to have a job”. Nevertheless, we believe there are many opportunities for employees to use a wide range of experiences to help them feel more appreciative and consequently happier and more satisfied with their work, which should lead to improved performance and success on the job.

Kurtz (2008) examined another scarcity intervention designed to increase appreciation of one’s present circumstances. Kurtz (2008) demonstrated that conceptualizing one’s college experience as nearly over increased students’ happiness. They also increased their participation in activities related to their college experience. The impending loss of the college experience prompted an increase in subjects’ valuing of the experience, increasing appreciation. In the workplace, thinking about the upcoming completion of a project that would mean reassignment to a new work team would be expected to heighten one’s enjoyment of the current team (assuming relations were amicable in the first place). Similarly, if an employee has just found out that his/her request for an overseas assignment has been granted, then thinking about leaving his/her current work setting would be expected to enhance the value and meaning ascribed to it. This process of ascribing increased value to conditions that are coming to an end is another reason to share plans for change with employees (besides surprises being stressful).

Lastly, it appears that the formal rituals of several religions make use of the scarcity principle. Going without meat on Fridays, temporarily giving up one’s favorite foods or technological devices such as mp3 players (e.g. for Lent) or engaging in periods of fasting can enhance one’s appreciation of the particular food or device, having enough to eat and of one’s life in general. There may be natural cycles in some businesses that require periodic “sacrifice”, but knowing that the sacrifice is time limited and a foreseeable part of the job (whether it’s the Christmas rush in retail sales, final exam week in academia or tax time in accounting) can allow employees to appreciate how good conditions usually are and relish the return to normalcy after the crunch period is over. The ritual of dressing casually on Fridays in some organizations offers another example of having something people enjoy that is done infrequently so as to enhance the appreciation of it.

**Appreciation and trust**

Dunn and Schweitzer (2005) demonstrated that gratitude, an aspect of appreciation, increases trust of acquaintances but not of people one knows well. Trust is a key ingredient of well-functioning organizations, and gratitude may foster the trust needed for organizations to function effectively. As organizations continue to work in various team formats, from small project teams to departmental teams, the need for trust in one another increases. Gratitude may be especially useful in increasing trust in short-lived, project-focused teams. For teams to work most effectively, they need to know they can rely on each other
and not feel that they will be deceived or betrayed. Effective teamwork necessitates trust. If one member is struggling with personal problems at home, it helps if he/she can tell other team members so that they can offer the necessary support to enable the struggling team member to resolve the problem most effectively. Social support seems to provide the most consistent buffer to stress and having trustworthy teammates facilitates developing the relationships necessary for social support. Expressing gratitude and appreciation may promote the development of trust and social support, while also reinforcing the behavior, as people tend to find it rewarding to be appreciated.

**Appreciation, altruism and organizational citizenship behavior**

Feeling grateful increases help given subsequently to others. For example, Emmons and McCullough (2003, study 2) found that people who had been randomly assigned to a condition intended to elicit feelings of gratitude reported offering more emotional support to others and were more likely to report having helped someone with a problem.

Gratitude has also been shown to increase generosity. Tsang (2006) randomly assigned subjects to receive a favor or a chance positive event. Those who received the favor were more likely than those who had experienced a chance positive event to allocate money to the benefactor rather than to themselves. Consequently, it is not merely that positive emotion results in greater altruism. However, the question remained whether it was feeling the emotion of gratitude or the social norm of reciprocity that caused greater altruism. However, Bartlett and DeSteno (2006) addressed this concern. In a clever series of experiments, they demonstrated that it was feeling grateful, and not the social norm of reciprocity, that resulted in greater helping of others. They also showed that feeling grateful increases the likelihood of subsequently helping strangers, not just of helping the benefactor. This underscores that feeling more positive affect in oneself, especially gratitude, supports more generosity toward others.

This research has implications for the workplace. Initial help, favors or gifts can begin a cycle of gratitude that leads to helping by those who were initially the recipients of help, and so on. Beneficiaries become benefactors. In a workplace, where people are not rewarded at the expense of others, which would tend to discourage workers from helping each other, receiving help would be expected to increase the likelihood of providing help to others (whether or not they were the original benefactor). Thus, helping would spread throughout the organization, promoting better performance and increases in social cohesion and well-being. However, research by Kashdan et al. (2009) suggests a caveat may be in order. They found that men were more likely to view receiving a gift as a burden and obligation and experience less gratitude than women. Willingness to openly express emotion partially mediated the gender difference. Consequently, research examining gender differences in perceptions of help and subsequent feelings and behavior is needed. Does the finding
regarding men’s reaction to receiving gifts also apply to receiving help? If so, then ways to provide help to men in the workplace that do not hurt collegiality and group cohesion need to be developed.

**Appreciation and social relationships**

Social connections at work have been chronically overlooked as a factor in business outcomes, but the Gallup Organization has demonstrated that having a friend at work is an important predictor of employee engagement and customer satisfaction (Buckingham and Coffman 1999). Unfortunately, friendships at work have often been discouraged; however, they are an important factor in job satisfaction (Snyder and Lopez 2007).

Appreciation is theorized to be a key factor in building and maintaining social bonds. We argue that it is likely the gratitude and interpersonal aspects of appreciation that are especially important in fostering social connections. Longitudinal research by Algoe et al. (2008, 2010) shows that gratitude is related to relationship quality. In another longitudinal study, Wood et al. (2008) demonstrated that individual differences in trait gratitude predicted subsequent increases in perceived social support over time. A huge body of research has linked social relationships and social support to mental and physical health (Cohen et al. 2000). When employees learn to notice and acknowledge the help they receive from co-workers, they are likely to receive greater social support as a result. It is easy to see that trust is also an important component of employees’ helping each other. All parties must feel that their helpfulness will not be used against them. Genuine social bonds help forge this trust. The meaning associated with helping others also has a spiritual quality, whereby the individual transcends the self into a transpersonal space where life is bigger than the individual alone.

Bryant and Veroff (2007) argued that savoring good times with others, which may constitute interpersonal appreciation, shared experiences of awe, or shared rituals, “provides a mechanism for building, broadening, and deepening human friendships” (p. 182). Later they suggest that

… savoring is an adhesive process that bonds human beings. Sharing the joy of camaraderie brings people closer together, enhances the quality, depth, resilience, and longevity of their friendships, and promotes the selfless agape love of close friendship. Thus, savoring processes are integral in the development and maintenance of friendship. (Bryant and Veroff 2007, p. 183)

This view seems keenly connected to our view of interpersonal appreciation. Relishing time with co-workers, friends or family and additionally, expressing appreciation to them, gets at the heart of interpersonal appreciation. It is not being grateful to them for what they have done for one, or for anything specific that they have given one. It is being grateful for them. It is appreciating their presence in one’s life, feeling lucky to have them. When people appreciate one another and recognize what they have in each other, they
strengthen social bonds and enhance their effectiveness in the many endeavors they pursue.

Lambert et al. (2010) found that expressing appreciation to a romantic partner or close friend is associated with increases in the perceived communal strength of the relationship, that is, the strength of the interpersonal bond. In the workplace, expressing appreciation or gratitude for help would be expected to increase connectedness and promote trust, knowledge sharing and cooperation. Indeed, this will likely foster an environment that optimizes collaboration and positive team performance.

Reis et al. (2000) also offered data on the importance of appreciation in social connectedness. They found that the best predictor of daily relatedness was feeling understood and appreciated by others. So feeling appreciated is key to daily feelings of relatedness which they demonstrated significantly predicted daily well-being. Consequently, fostering appreciation should promote relatedness and, ultimately, well-being.

The positive affect created through this process should promote effective problem solving and innovation. Furthermore, it should create the “secure base” described by attachment theory, which has been extended to adults (see, e.g. Rholes and Simpson 2004). According to attachment theory, a secure base is needed for effective exploration of the environment. The more people feel connected and safe, the more they are able to act autonomously, to explore and to be creative (Simmons et al. 2009). Many employers want their employees to be willing to take calculated risks, to be creative in their work and to explore diverse ideas. When supervisors foster strong social connections with supervisees and within work teams they provide the “secure base”, that facilitates employees being creative in their work, exploring diverse ideas, and talking about their concerns in a way that opens dialogs that help develop new approaches.

Pryce-Jones (2010) has written about the importance of appreciation in the workplace. According to Pryce-Jones (2010, pp. 56–57),

> When you’re appreciated, you’ll feel and do a host of additional and positive things in the short and long term. You’ll feel more motivated and energized, help others more, set more challenging goals, want to stay longer in your job, and take less time off sick.

And later she states “It also increases output because you’ll be more likely to repeat whatever it was that led to that appreciation” (p. 57). Appreciation of one’s contributions by one’s peers and one’s supervisor can be a powerful force, enhancing both one’s enjoyment of one’s work as well as one’s performance. Research is needed to identify the best ways for supervisors to indicate appreciation, and to examine possible cultural or gender differences in effective ways to indicate appreciation. As business becomes more international, it becomes especially important to understand cultural differences in expressing appreciation. For example, Bello et al. (2010) found differences in methods of
expressing appreciation in the USA vs. China. They found that US participants used verbal and nonverbal means of expressing appreciation about equally. In contrast, Chinese participants preferred nonverbal over verbal means.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, poor relationships at work, as exemplified by workplace abuse and/or bullying, can make a job a nightmare, in terms of both worker well-being and productivity (Einarsen and Mikkelsen 2003, Hoel et al. 2003). Besides lawsuits, absenteeism and/or turnover, the negative emotions it generates can adversely affect employee morale, physical health and effective problem solving (Mikkelsen and Einarsen 2002, Hoel et al. 2003).

**Unanswered questions and directions for future research**

We have speculated about the reciprocal relations between spirituality and appreciation. Future research needs to examine the causal relations between these variables, in and out of the workplace. Are outcomes of interest such as greater productivity, more effective collaboration or reduced absenteeism caused by unique aspects of either, or both, or by joint aspects? What are the most effective ways to foster appreciation and spirituality at work? What organizational policies, procedures or practices promote spirituality and appreciation? What cultural shifts need to take place within organizations to facilitate more appreciation and spirituality?

**Conclusion**

Appreciation and spirituality are key factors in well-being and success in the workplace. Appreciation and spirituality are closely connected and show reciprocal causality. While the term spirituality may make some people uncomfortable when used in connection with the workplace, appreciation may be more acceptable. Therefore, focusing on appreciation may be an effective way to address spirituality in the workplace. We have reviewed evidence that appreciation fosters trust, helping and the formation and maintenance of social bonds. As these factors promote workplace success, increasing appreciation is expected to increase workplace success. Although several aspects of appreciation have been studied and interventions to increase them have been evaluated and found to be successful, little work on appreciation has been conducted in the workplace. Consequently, much remains to be examined regarding appreciation in the workplace and its connection to workplace spirituality. Although we know that having friends at work and feeling appreciated are important for employee satisfaction and well-being, a clearer picture of the mechanisms through which appreciation leads to better psychological and physical health and greater productivity would be valuable. In addition, research is needed to develop an understanding of the most effective ways to express appreciation in the workplace and the most effective organizational and individual workplace interventions to foster appreciation. We hope this paper will encourage researchers to examine appreciation in the workplace, as we believe the employees, the organization and their clients will all benefit.
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Note

1. This distinction of being grateful for vs. to was also made by Lambert et al. (2009) with regard to their definition of benefit triggered vs. generalized gratitude.

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