

## Corporate spirituality as organizational praxis

### Abstract

A methodology for doing research into corporate spirituality should enable us to deal with the religious component of spirituality instead of trying to separate spirituality from religious beliefs, as the positivist school proposes. Waaijman's phenomenological-dialogical research cycle enables us to deal with religious diversity in a scientific way. Sölle's concept of democratized spirituality allows for discovering everyday (corporate) life as a finding place and workplace for spirituality. Replacing theistic terms by the concept of 'alterity' in a definition of spirituality may stimulate corporate spirituality without excluding or disqualifying spiritual diversity. Arendt's concept of 'action' is closely connected to democratised spirituality. From that we can deduce a number of characteristics of corporate spirituality that give flesh and bone to what corporate spirituality can be. This allows us to see that many elements of corporate spirituality are already present in our organizational praxis. It also tells us that we need to become more aware of them and practice them. In doing so we set out on a 'via transformativa' that eventually may transform our organizations.

**Keywords:** spirituality, corporate spirituality, organizational praxis, vita activa, Waaijman, Sölle, Arendt

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## **1. Shortcomings of the positivistic outlook on corporate spirituality**

The domain 'spirituality and organisation' can be studied according to roughly two methods of scientific inquiry. First there is a positivistic school of scientific inquiry. In their ground breaking 'Handbook of Workplace Spirituality' Giacalone and Jurkiewicz formulate the goal of this perspective as follows: 'Researchers must effectively demonstrate the utility of spirituality in the workplace by framing it as a question of value-added: How does spirituality help us to undertake work processes more effectively?' (Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003, p.9-10). This positivistic perspective requires an objective approach of spirituality by separating it from religion and faith. Giacalone and Jurkiewicz notice that a lot of work in the area of organisation and spirituality is characterized by unscientific rhetoric and polemic, well-intended ideals, religious claims and a lack of connection with organizational studies.

The emphasis of the positivistic approach on effectiveness is legitimate in itself but is limiting at the same time. Spirituality runs the risk of becoming the servant of organizational performance. However, since spirituality is also associated with substantial rationality, it is always more than a servant. Spirituality may challenge our basic assumptions about organisations and become the onset of critical discussion of them. By means of an objective, scientific and non-religious approach to spirituality Giacalone and Jurkiewicz want to avoid getting involved in endless theological disputes and evangelising.

It is however doubtful if a neutral position in this matter is possible or desirable. First of all a neutral position for research on organizational spirituality is impossible. Not explicitly choosing for or against a specific religious or normative point of view or practice is a choice itself; that is a choice for the status quo: i.e. the existing praxis in organisations. A positivist approach seriously runs the risk of becoming uncritical and conformist. As historian Howard Zinn once put it: 'You can't be neutral on a moving train'.

Secondly, it is doubtful if a neutral, technical spirituality makes sense in a society that is becoming increasingly diverse and has to deal with a multitude of, sometimes conflicting, beliefs and convictions. Would an approach of spirituality that explicitly deals with the value-laden component of spirituality not be more beneficial? That seems to be the case to me and in that respect the positivist research program falls short.

The potential lack of a critical attitude and the need for an approach that can handle the religious element bring us to the second approach to spirituality research.

## **2. Spirituality as religious action research**

Maybe our ideas about research into corporate spirituality need a shift similar to the one we have seen in organizational sciences over the last decades: a shift from the ideal of positivism to dialectical thinking by acknowledging that in every scientific and practical activity the researcher is part of the observation and the relation between subject and object is a practical, action-oriented one and not an entirely contemplative one. The position of science thus changes from neutral or a-political to critical and actively involved. The idea of truth then transforms from essential/objective/abstract/an-sich to practical/operational/critical/dynamic/real life (Fierro, 1977, p.89).

Waaajman (2000) has a similar approach to (religious) spirituality. In line with Aristotelian thinking about knowledge and truth he situates the study of spirituality in the sphere of human praxis. The sphere of human praxis is characterized by ambiguity and unpredictability. When doing research in this sphere one cannot expect to find or create exact, objective or universal knowledge, for example quantitative models. This has two consequences for the methodology of researching corporate spirituality. First of all it must enable us to explicate corporate spirituality in real life situations and personal experiences with corporate spirituality and it must enable us to reflect on them: mobilizing experience, discovering, weighing and evaluating options and setting goals in a particular situation.

The second consequence of this approach is that research into corporate spirituality should not be too normative too quickly. The required attitude is best characterized by an appreciative interest in spirituality that is positive, inviting, curious and non-judgemental at first hand.

Needing an involved, exploratory, reflective and open-minded methodology

Waaajman proposes a phenomenological-dialogical research cycle for researching spirituality. This cycle is composed of four stages (Waaajman, 2000, p.560-561):

1. descriptive research: accurately discerning and explicating concrete spiritual experiences, for example: what forms and appearances does spirituality have, through which language is it expressed, which root-metaphors characterize it, in which social context does it take place?
2. hermeneutic analysis: interpreting spiritual manifestations (especially texts) and analysing their inner logic
3. systematic analysis: determining constituent factors within a common knowing, collectively and critically assessing and evaluating findings and experiences, forming a collective memory
4. mystagogic insight: the ability to discern between the actual situation of an individual and its developmental potential and showing a way to bridge the distance between the two.

Waaajman, contrary to the positivist approach, explicitly gives space for religious experiences and religious praxis in his research into spirituality as he considers the religious element pivotal. He defines spirituality as the 'divine-human relationship' (Waaajman, 2000, p.424) and focuses on that relationship in his research program as the central theme.

Waaajman attributes a number of characteristics to this divine-human relationship in spirituality (Waaajman, 2000, p.362-363):

1. the relationship takes effect between God and the individual person
2. God's spirit and man's spirit mutually interact
3. the relationship is an intense, purifying and uniting process
4. this process starts as an inner and intimate process
5. in this process man is active and passive, acting and receiving
6. the relationship exteriorises in the material world, for example in new habits, cultural expression, knowledge and rituals that mediate man to God
7. the relationship between God and man has a transformational, processual nature (Waaajman, 2000, p.421-422).

A drawback of Waaajman's approach is that it suggests narrowing down spirituality to Christian, theistic spirituality thereby excluding non-theistic and secular spirituality. Waaajman elaborately defends himself against these objections (Waaajman, 2000,

p.425-432) pointing out that he intends his approach to be based upon, to be open and appropriate for all kinds of spirituality, including non-theistic and secular spirituality: 'Whatever substituting concept we form (for example: ultimate reality, the Highest, the Absolute et cetera, ECvdD), the perspective of its designer will dominate. The term 'God' however has gone through so many divergent experiences, it has the desired inclusiveness' (Waaijman, 2000, p.428). By its nature spirituality is open minded since it is more concerned with praxis than with cognitive or intellectual analysis and understanding. Nevertheless Waaijman's language seems to be unfortunate. Terms like 'God', 'divine' and 'purifying' are strongly associated with Christian, religious spirituality. Many find this objectionable.

As a researcher I am reaching a difficult point here. On the one hand I need a solid and proven methodology and Waaijman provides one. His methodology may be a valuable addition to the positivist approach of corporate spirituality. It enables us to deal with religious diversity and religious experience in a scientific way and avoids losing sight on critical spirituality. By taking existing corporate spirituality as a starting point, by stressing collective reflection on it and by being sensitive for developmental potentiality it avoids being otherworldly.

On the other hand I do not want to lose half of the world beforehand because of easily misunderstood terminology. But maybe 'notorious' Christian theology itself lends us a helping hand with this problem.

### **3. Political theology and the democratization of spirituality**

'The silent cry, mysticism and resistance' by Sölle (1998) is a critique of mysticism or spirituality that is solely focused on the self and the divine and that, as a result of that, is a-political and socially uninterested and detached. Sölle calls this 'the aestheticization of mysticism' (Sölle, 1998, p.80): an escapist, egoistic, egocentric religion for the 'I', for oneself. She refers to the New Age movement as an example of this. According to Sölle the New Age movement is characterized by an emphasis on experience, by intellectual shallowness and little appreciation for durable community and tradition. These traits result in an introvert attitude that creates non-involvement and a lack of solidarity with the weak.

It must be noted that the label 'New Age' is too diffuse to be really discerning. The kind of spirituality Sölle is hinting at is probably best characterized by a strong orientation towards an inner self and is aimed personal development.

Opposite to this kind of spiritual disengagement Sölle poses the 'movement to the outside from within' (Sölle, 1998, p.82). Inner spirituality ultimately wants to reach out and to engage with social issues. It seeks dialogue with the spirituality of other people and it wants to exteriorise and materialize in praxis. In this way inner and outer are connected. Please notice the similarities between Sölle and Waaijman.

According to Sölle mysticism or spirituality are much more far reaching than just the concern for individual salvation or enlightenment. Spirituality's engagement spans the whole world (Sölle, 1998, p.225). That shows spirituality to be an essentially relational concept in which worldly relations are vital. By 'sanctifying the world' (Sölle, 1998, p.226) the traditional boundaries between the sacred and the profane disappear and within the profane the sacred is discovered: 'but particularly in engagement with and commitment to 'here' and 'now', where God comes to us in unforeseeable ways, we meet the God of mysticism, whose ways we do not know' (Sölle, 1998, p.233). Sölle suggests that we do not only encounter the divine in the sacred, in our inner selves or in enlightened ecstasy but in particular in daily reality. This is what she calls the democratization of mysticism: 'I mean to say that the

mystical sensitivity, that resides in all of us, is being allowed to return, is being dug out of the rubble and wreck of triviality' (Sölle, 1998, p.16). Bouckaert has described this as a 'fundamental transformation of our commitment to people and things' (Bouckaert, 2004, p.194).

This shift in perspective may enable us to discover the divine-human relationship in everyday life and also in everyday corporate life. The remarkable thing with this shift in perspective is that in our search for corporate spirituality we, as it were, turn our eyes away from the heavens and start looking for divine-human transformation in our everyday work and in the triviality of our organizations. The key question then becomes: in which organizational settings and in what kind of organizational relations does this divine-human transformation, as Waaijman defines it, take effect? Can people in a corporate or organizational setting relate to someone or something and undergo a transformation that is purifying, uniting and intense? And could this something or someone consequently be considered a manifestation of the divine? How does it affect the people involved? Sölle argues that (corporate) spirituality is not something we need to add to our corporate world. It rather is something that is already there, latent and buried in our offices and factories.

But the democratic character of spirituality is twofold. It also means that all people are equally 'equipped' to become spiritual persons. Spirituality is not exclusively meant for or available to guru's or believers. The spiritual competence resides in all of us. One does not have to become a Christian, a Bhuddist or an eco-activist before one can engage in spirituality. In fact as a consequence of the democratic character of spirituality the distinction between religious and the non-religious or between religious traditions becomes much less of an issue.

With these ideas Sölle stays close to her intellectual roots: political theology from the 1960's and 1970's. Having lost faith in an universal, kerygmatic, dogmatic and private Christendom political theology wanted to be 'public, practical and critical' (Fierro, 1977, p.19) and to move from objective orthodoxy to local, provisional orthopraxis. For political theology the political is the all-encompassing and decisive realm of humanity: 'The ultimate horizon of faith takes on flesh and blood in the penultimate horizon of the political.' (Fierro, 1977, p.30). It was felt that God could be no longer be met in a mythical or metaphysical, abstract 'Thou' but in a worldly, plural 'you' (Fierro, 1977, p.14). Christian theology should no longer offer scientifically derived, Christian blueprints for a better world but it should provide theological representations that inspire and call for action and praxis in the real world, for example: God, soul, liberation, salvation, grace and love. These concepts have no scientific status in the traditional sense but rather they operate in much the same way as Kant's necessary concepts of reason; 'They are representations that allude to the totality of a subject's life, the totality of interhuman relationships and the totality of history' (Fierro, 1977, p.241).

The idea of democratization of spirituality may seem to be the typical product of a radically modern theology but it fits well within contemporary theology. Berkhof (1990) demonstrates three points concerning the disclosure of God. Firstly, most theologians nowadays generally accept that God not only reveals himself through the two traditional sources of divine knowledge (the Church and the Bible) but in numerous ways, for example in nature, sexuality, beauty and community. Secondly, Berkhof points out that encountering God is unpredictable and cannot be rationally analysed or proven beforehand. One can only retrospectively account for one's religious experience.

Thirdly Berkhof argues, as does Sölle, that the revelation of God on the one hand is democratic in the sense that it has a low threshold and takes effect in the natural world in numerous forms and variations. On the other hand it cannot be manipulated or managed, it is subjective and poly-interpretable and any encounter with God only reveals a part of God. The way God chooses to reveal himself, Berkhof points out, is often discordant with our spiritual expectations.

Although not wholly unproblematic, Sölle's democratisation of spirituality may offer an refreshing, additional look at corporate spirituality that allows for exploring spirituality in a practical, open, inclusive, scientific and potentially critical way. Both a challenge and an opportunity is to explicate the religious component in such a way that it stimulates corporate spirituality without excluding or disqualifying spiritual diversity. French personalist philosopher Mounier once put it this way: '... assez souple que des chrétiens et des non-chrétiens puissent l'accepter' (Ayati, 1999, p.63). Maybe we can explicate the openness Waaijman intends by replacing the word 'God' with 'alterity', as is suggested by Bouckaert (Bouckaert, 2007). The notion of 'alterity' has been established by Levinas but also emerges in Buber's and Derrida's philosophy (Reynolds, 2001) and is used in both the religious/transcendental sense and in a more general, anthropological or philosophical sense.

Derrida for example refers to 'l'autre' as an 'incomprehensible guest in language', 'un arrivant without traceable origin' that involves him in 'an enigmatic conjuncture that I myself do not understand or control. Rather it grasps me. I would want to escape it but I can't.' (Sneller, 2000). Please note that this short account of an experience matches remarkably well with Waaijman's concept of spirituality. The difference is that Derrida doesn't use explicitly traditional religious language.

Van IJssel uses a definition of spirituality that corresponds rather well with the democratic conception of spirituality: 'In accordance with more postmodern ways of thinking about ethics, a spiritual approach of ethics is also founded on an enlarged sense of—not necessarily human—interconnection between self and other' (Van IJssel, 2004/5).

Replacing 'God' for 'alterity' hopefully firmly establishes the democratic character of spirituality. I therefore, modestly, propose to define spirituality as follows: a transformational relationship that/in which:

1. takes effect in an encounter of an individual with the other/alterity
2. is an intense, purifying and uniting process
3. the individual and the other/alterity mutually interact
4. the individual is active and passive, acting and receiving
5. this process starts as an inner, intimate process
6. exteriorises in the material world, in concrete praxis that mediates the individual to the other/alterity
7. has a transformational, processual nature.

Example 1 of an experience that is (or can be) the start of corporate spirituality. Notice that the experience complies to at least 5 of the 7 characteristics of our definition of spirituality.

*'I was working at a care center. As a social worker I was working in the late shift. At around ten o' clock in the evening a cab stopped at our door. The cab driver opened the car's door and told me his customer had been lying into the bush for two days and was very weak. It was one of our clients who was very depressive and suffered a panic disorder. I asked him how things could have gotten so worse. He told me he had had an epileptic seizure and had fallen in the bush. He was so weak he couldn't get up until someone found him. He was so exhausted I had to carry him. He was as light as a feather. He weighed almost nothing. I carried him to his room and put him in his bed. I gave him some milk and he fell asleep. I still remember that when I held him in my arms, I had a strong feeling of compassion. This man was 15 years older than I was and there he was: completely helpless and dependent in my arms. This was what I was born for! Helping people and giving them love. A tremendous feeling and at the same time saddening that people can be so vulnerable.'*

Example 2 of an experience that has been the start of corporate spirituality. The example consists of two fragments of interviews with Ray Anderson, CEO of Interface.

VININGS, Ga. — What Ray Anderson calls his “conversion experience” occurred in the summer of 1994, when he was asked to give the sales force at Interface, the carpet tile company he founded, some talking points about the company’s approach to the environment. “That’s simple,” Mr. Anderson recalls thinking. “We comply with the law.” But as a sales tool, “compliance” lacked inspirational verve. So he started reading about environmental issues, and thinking about them, until pretty soon it hit him: “I was running a company that was plundering the earth,” he realized. “I thought, ‘Damn, some day people like me will be put in jail!’ “It was a spear in the chest.”

(<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/22/science/earth/22ander.html>)

*What do you consider your environmental coming-of-age moment or experience?*

My epiphanal moment came about as the result of a book, Paul Hawken's The Ecology of Commerce. It landed on my desk at a propitious time; I was preparing to make a speech to an internal task force about my environmental vision for Interface. As the date for the speech loomed closer, I began to become more uncomfortable with what I might say. Comply? Obey the law? It didn't seem to be the right answer. Fortunately, Paul Hawken provided more than the impetus, he provided the framework for that initial speech, and in subsequent months and years, has continued to advise our company. He along with Amory Lovins, David Suzuki, Janine Benyus, and other experts were our educators and mentors in the early days.

(<http://www.grist.org/comments/interactivist/2004/11/08/anderson/>)

#### **4. The spirituality of action**

In 'The human condition' Hannah Arendt makes a bright and surprising analysis of labor, work and action that deepens and enriches our understanding of organizing. 'The Human Condition' also provides a conceptual framework that further clarifies our understanding of corporate spirituality. I will argue that spirituality and Arendt's conception of action are closely connected, that spirituality belongs in the public realm and subsequently I will demonstrate how this can be transferred to organizational praxis for corporate spirituality.

##### *4.1 Action and spirituality correspond on essential points*

Waaijman's and Sölle's conceptions of spirituality and Arendt's action correspond on three essential points.

First of all, the fundamental plurality of the human condition coincides with alterity. Arendt asserts that human plurality distinguishes people from each other and that plurality equals them because people can express and communicate their plurality. In the field of spirituality the concept of alterity is used in much the same sense. Alterity on the one hand stands for the radically different and the unknown and on the other hand it is that which seeks to communicate and to relate to us and can be known or experienced, at least partially.

The way Arendt uses the notion of 'plurality' differs in one respect from the way 'alterity' is used in the field of spirituality. In the latter it is used in a broad sense that stretches from human alterity (plurality) to non-human alterity, for example nature. But eventually the relation between an individual and non-human alterity must get its place in the human, public realm if it is not be confined to inner self.

Secondly, from the viewpoint of spirituality encountering alterity can be the onset of personal spiritual transformation; an intense, relational process in which an individual experiences being united with the other/alterity that evokes personal transformation. In Arendt's view plurality is the source of self-disclosure: a continuous, relational process in which people, by recognizing each other's alterity and by acting and speaking together, disclose themselves and unite themselves. Spiritual transformation and self-disclosure both have the potential of continuous enacting and transformation of one's identity by means of interaction with others.

Thirdly, self-disclosure in Arendt's view is an end in itself and has no other goal than the act itself: 'Greatness, therefore, or the specific meaning of each deed can lie only in the performance itself, and neither in its motivation nor its achievement' (Arendt, 1958, p.206). Action produces no (material) results in the way 'work' and 'labor' do. Action allows us to escape from obscurity and oblivion and to discover, disclose, develop and enact our unique individuality continuously. We can only, Arendt asserts, retrospectively perceive the meaning of our actions; 'action reveals itself fully, only to the storyteller, that is, to the backward glance of the historian, who indeed always knows better what it was all about than the participants' (Arendt, 1958, p.192). In this sense action is meaningless to the actor himself. In much the same sense is spirituality not primarily connected to utility, efficiency or effectiveness. The emphasis on the praxis of spirituality, contrary to for example cognitive analysis in theology, stipulates the importance of spiritual acts themselves. It is the spiritual act itself that matters for its goals or results cannot be made or produced but they can only be performed. Therefore the performance itself is the goal and the performance leaves no (material) residue that could be considered the goal or the desired result.



#### *4.2 Spirituality belongs in the public realm*

If we conceive spirituality as a transformational relationship that takes effect in an encounter between an individual and the other/alterity we come across Arendt's distinction between the public and the private realm. Arendt asserts that people are dead if they are no longer a member of a community and that things only really exist if they are known and discussed in the public realm: 'A life without speech and action ... is literally dead to the world; it has ceased to be a human life because it is no longer lived among men' (Arendt, 1958, p.176). According to this line of argument spirituality that is restricted to the private realm is non-existent to the world.

Political theology however highlights the public orientation of spirituality by pointing at the world, the secular, the profane; that is: the political as the place where the sacred is to be encountered. Waaijman indicates that divine-human transformation is to be materialized in our earthly existence and needs to be assessed and evaluated in some form of collectivity. Spirituality has a definitive and decisive connection with the public realm in the sense that it needs the public realm as it's finding place and workplace.

This is not all the case with labor and work, the other two activities of the *vita activa* Arendt distinguishes. The physical nature and the endlessness of labor exclude the 'animal laborans' from the public realm and confine him to his private world. In that sense the 'animal laborans' is dead to the world: an anonymous, replacable production factor that is hardly able to encounter alterity and engage in some form of shared or corporate spirituality: '... the laboring activity itself, concentrated exclusively on life and its maintenance, is oblivious of the world to the point of worldlessness' (Arendt, 1958, p.118).

'Homo faber', the tool maker, does have access to the public realm: the exchange market where he buys and sells his tools and products. Homo faber produces his products and tools in the loneliness of his craftsmanship or in an industrial setting that levels his uniqueness. He buys and sells on the market and consumes or uses his products in the relative loneliness of his private circle. But even though the exchange market is a meeting place, on the market the product is central and not the maker. Relations on a typical market are limited to a-political, economical exchange in which utility, valuation and effectiveness are central. 'The impulse that drives the fabricator to the public market place is the desire for products, not for people ...' (Arendt, 1958, p.209). The restrained character of the exchange market makes it much less adequate as a finding and workplace for spirituality.

Of the *vita activa* labor and work are activities that are not or hardly connectible to spirituality.

#### *4.3 Organizational praxis for corporate spirituality*

Arendt repeatedly warns that our society and our organisations are increasingly being dominated by work and labor and are leaving less and less room for plurality and action. This impoverishes our organizations with superficial goal hunting, instrumental thinking, efficiency-drive, economical reduction, endless repetition, consumption and oblivion. If that is the case, that also diminishes the spiritual potency of organisations since spirituality can only flourish in the action sphere.

But continuing in Arendt's line of thinking we have the alternative of considering an organization to be a public realm that secures an open space for action: creating bonds on basis of which people engage in experiments and adventures. An organization could also function as a place for collective critical assessment of action and sense making. Story telling is an elementary way of relating things and action into a

sensible narrative. It also serves as a collective memory and as a place for retrospective contemplativeness (Assmann, 1995).

An organisation may also become the place for an 'authentic political experience' (Arendt, 1958, p.238-239) we often tend to exclude from the public realm because we consider its religious source suspicious: the act of forgiving. Forgiveness releases an organisation of retaliatory chain reactions and allows us to refocus on the person, who is forgiven, and not on his deeds.

Arendt challenges us to lift our organisations from instrumental, economic machinery where people are merely 'human resources' up to a spiritual community where justice is done to the fundamental plurality of people enhancing the enactment of their humanity.

If spirituality essentially belongs in the public realm and spirituality consequently is connected to action, we can deduce from that a number of characteristics of corporate spirituality. First of all, corporate spirituality by its nature is uncontrollable and unpredictable. It cannot be managed or produced. To a great extent corporate spirituality needs an open space for innovative action. Its unpredictability cannot be managed away. The remedy for the 'chaotic uncertainty of the future' (Arendt, 1958, p.237) is our being capable of making and keeping promises with fellow men.

Secondly, we need to recognize that leaders or guru's are not and should not be the 'makers' in the public realm, also when it comes to corporate spirituality. Every individual person can be a valuable contributor to action in the public realm.

Stimulating the democratic or public character of an organizational public realm is vital.

Thirdly, in order to avoid radicalisation and excesses of any sort corporate spirituality needs collective review. Mobilizing and preserving common sense is an essential part of what Sölle calls democratization of mysticism. Arendt supports this: 'A noticeable decrease in the common sense in any given community and a noticeable increase in superstition and gullibility are therefore almost infallible signs of alienation from the world' (Arendt, 1958, p.209).

The fourth point is that, as is the case with action, the meaning of corporate spiritual praxis can only retrospectively be perceived. That requires a certain level of tolerance with regard to what now seems to be of little value, ineffective, inefficient, daring or risky. It requires tolerance to what lies outside current normative frames.

Finally, the irreversibility and unpredictability of action imply willingness to acknowledge the unforeseeable but potentially harmful consequences of our acts.

Furthermore '... it needs forgiving, dismissing, in order for life to make it possible to go on by constantly releasing men from what they have done unknowingly' (Arendt, 1958, p.240). Corporate spirituality can mean acknowledging guilt for past or present deeds and forgiving them.

We are currently witnessing the slow emergence of structures and institutions that make up for an organizational public realm. Shareholder activism, corporate governance, workers councils, autonomous work teams, economic democracy, stakeholder dialogue, audits, sustainability reports and codes of conduct; all of these ingredients are gradually forming legal and institutionalised corporate structures that create a platform or a stage for assessment, evaluation, reflection, sense making, forgiving and new bonding and new action.

## 5. Integration

If we consider an organisation as a finding place and work place for transformation between the 'I' and alterity and combine it with Arendt's organizational critique we find that corporate spirituality has four distinct characteristics.

First of all corporate spirituality needs an organizational public realm where people discuss the organizations' policies and outcomes, tell and create their corporate stories, stand up and initiate collective action. Those who have no access to this organizational public realm are confined to their personal spirituality and do not participate and contribute to the corporate spirituality. For those who do have access to it, it provides a stage for bonding, experimenting, excelling, sense making, remembering, celebrating, failing and forgiving. An organizational public realm represents the possibility of discovering and uniting with life in all its aspects, personal growth and self-disclosure. An organizational public realm resists corporate shallowness and secures an organisation that is as profound as life itself.

Some forms and degrees of organizational public realm can indicatively be distinguished, for example: the meeting culture in an organization (the meeting as a 'mini-polis'), a company newspaper, employee blogging, organizational democracy in all its degrees and variations and dialogue and interaction with external stakeholders. Secondly, corporate spirituality needs an organizational memory that members can fall back upon for constructing, evaluating and reconstructing corporate identity. Oral history or story telling are important and natural ways of preserving and sharing authentic corporate spirituality. They do however have a limited temporal horizon that does not extend more than 80 to 100 years (3 to 4 generations) (Assman, 1995). If organizational narratives materialize into a complex of texts, rites, monuments, recitation, observance and values, that provide formative and normative impulses to a group, cultural or institutional memory emerges (Assman, 1995). By means of an organizational memory members of an organization are able to share knowledge about, to reflect on and to practice and develop corporate spirituality on a collective level. Organizational memory thus in many ways fills the organizational public realm with practices and content. As a shared frame of reference for collective, public and critical evaluation it helps an organization not to operate on a basis of oblivion and mindlessness.

Thirdly, corporate spirituality may help us develop other ways of assessing the meaning and value of an organization and its outcomes. Traditionally we tend to focus on the yearly financial bottom line. In the last two decades the triple bottom line has given an enormous enrichment for companies and society. It stresses the importance of corporate citizenship and the mutual interests between business and society. Corporate spirituality may help us see things in longitudinal retrospect and in multidimensional terms. Goals can be achieved on a yearly basis but meaning can only be given to retrospectively. It might help us to see that a company's story is part of a bigger story. Asking ourselves the question: 'what has our company brought about in its last ten years of operation?' is starting to realize that a company is not only an actor on a neutral, a-historic market but it is also a small or bigger part of the story of mankind. What were the outcomes of our actions, which lasting effects did we contribute to, which of the things we have done are worth remembering or preserving? The answers to these questions might just make organizations a little bit more aware of themselves, perhaps more critical, proud, modest or patient with themselves and may provide strong impulses for innovation.

Corporate spirituality, finally, needs mystagogic insight. As Waaijman defines it: the ability to discern between the actual situation of an organization and its

developmental potential and to show a way to bridge the distance between the two (Waaijman, 2000, p.561). When it comes to spirituality it is easy to become overenthusiastic, radical, overdemanding, supererogatory or, the other side of the spectrum, lax, yo yo or arbitrary. Part of mystagogic insight is 'fronèsis': the fine art of balancing between fixed ideals and crusading for principles on one side and shying away from the consequences of one's own choices and development on the other side. Lievegoed calls this 'the spiritually responsible 'moral' compromise, halfway between fundamentalism and no-nonsense policy' (Lievegoed, 1988, p.39).

## 6. Research plans

I want to stress that I consider corporate spirituality not to be a model, a normative ideal, a blueprint or a scheme for organizational effectiveness or spiritual success. My preliminary assumption is that corporate spirituality is a complex of phenomena that already exists in organizations. As I pointed out before many elements of corporate spirituality are already present in our organizational praxis. We probably need to become more aware of it, explicate it and practice it. This has to do with the nature of spirituality (and action) itself. Spirituality cannot be made (as in the ancient Greek verb 'poiesis') but it has to be practiced (as in the ancient Greek verb 'praxis'): development and awareness through steady, reflective practice. Corporate spirituality is not absolutely absent in today's corporation but through reflective praxis we can become more aware of its presence and gradually cultivate it. In doing so we set out on a 'via transformativa' that eventually may transform our organizations.

Concerning corporate spirituality the research program of the Center for Social Innovation connects to the research cycle Waaijman proposes. Research will start in the first stage of this cycle: descriptive research. The first challenge is to accurately discern and explicate concrete spiritual appearances. In which organizational settings and in what kind of organizational relations does the individual-other/alterity transformation, as we have defined it, take effect? Can people in a corporate or organizational setting relate to someone or something and undergo a transformation that is purifying, uniting and intense? Can this transformational relationship consequently be considered spiritual? How does it affect the people involved? Is it a rare phenomenon or does it happen very often? With an empirical-phenomenological research strategy we intend to draw up a preliminary map of corporate spirituality. The second step will be to interpret spiritual manifestations and to analyse their inner logic by means of hermeneutic analysis.

In the stages of systematic analysis and mystagogic insight participative forms of action research may be appropriate. Interesting questions are if and how people individually and collectively can learn, practice and develop spiritually and to see if and how some sort of organizational transformation takes effect.

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