

Staffordshire University

**Spirituality, Social Work Education and  
Workplace Well-being: towards a  
critical framework**

Doctor of Philosophy  
on the Basis of Published Work

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**Spirituality, Social Work Education and  
Workplace Well-being: towards a critical  
framework**

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requirements of Staffordshire University for the  
award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
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## Explanatory Note.

Apart from the Personal Preface, I will refer to myself throughout the rest of the thesis as ‘the author’. The discussions that follow are illustrated and supported throughout by indented *italicised* quotations from my various publications. Where there is a joint publication, the quotations are mine and represent my contribution to the publication. For ease of reference, each quotation will be followed by a reference number in square brackets **[1]** to indicate which of my published works is being cited. Page numbers where appropriate are included as follows **[2:18]**. Full details of my publications are given in the *List of Published Work* section. If any of my quotations contains another author’s words, these will be indicated by **a change in font to make the authorship transparent; this same font will be used when citing other authors.**

In publication **[1]** co-authored with Professor Margaret Holloway, I was the principal author for chapters 1, 2, 4 & 7, although I contributed material to some of the other chapters; and in publication **[8]** co-authored with Dr Neil Thompson I was the principal contributor to the first half of the article, up to and including the section *Spirituality and the equality agenda*.

# Abstract

Although social work as an international profession has begun to take spirituality seriously as part of its professional discourse and commitment to best practice, in the UK there has been considerable reluctance to regard it positively.

This thesis argues for a comprehensive understanding of spirituality that relates to deep, human themes including meaning and purpose, mystery and awe, concepts which are by no means limited to, or restricted by, religious perspectives. Spirituality, it is argued, is *'what we do to give expression to our chosen world-view'*, and as such is an all-encompassing concept that helps us understand and appreciate the positive and negative aspects of humanity. The author builds upon and develops existing theoretical perspectives to demonstrate the relevance of spirituality to the professional social work discourse.

A 'co-creative' /action research methodology was adopted to enable key 'players' in social work education and practice (students, academics, practitioners, service users and carers) to 'co-create' and own a theoretical framework that would enable spirituality fulfil a key role in the social work curriculum.

The author's new strap-line for social work -*celebrating diversity with social justice* - argues for an understanding of spirituality that is all-encompassing in its scope, and recognises the ways in which spirituality can be both a positive and negative influence at a wider level in society. His

discussion of the key concept of authentic and inauthentic spirituality demonstrates its relevance to the core social work values of anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice.

The discussion of *workplace well-being* in the thesis is a further distinctive development of the author's understanding of spirituality and the contribution it can make to social work theory and practice.

## **Spirituality, Social Work Education and Workplace Well-being: towards a critical framework**

### **Personal Preface**

The significance of my own personal journey in developing my research interest in the area of spirituality deserves a brief contextualising comment. When I came into social work education in 1993 I had previous experience of faith community leadership in a multi-cultural town in Yorkshire, and then as a university chaplain. In these areas of work I developed a range of community development links, driven by a strong sense of social justice which for me was triggered by powerful strands in both Old Testament and New Testament theology within the Christian Bible. I was also heavily influenced by the impact of Liberation Theology with its call for emancipatory practice. A community dimension to faith and spirituality, therefore, has always been one of my personal and professional 'drivers'.

When I began my career as a social work educator I encountered a culture where subjects like religion and spirituality were regarded as 'no-go' areas as far as the curriculum was concerned. The attitudes of some members of staff clearly regarded such topics as 'part of the problem', not least because some aspects of 'organised religion' can be oppressive and discriminatory to certain groups of people in society. It took me some time to re-evaluate my own position to see whether it really was compatible with social work values.

A seminal moment in this journey was a discussion with two social work colleagues, one a committed Christian, the other an equally committed atheist. My Christian colleague articulated a deep concern that people of faith within social work were being discriminated against because of their faith, and were having to 'leave their faith outside the office door when they came to work'. From this colleague's point of view it was important that such issues were discussed openly within anti-discriminatory social work training and education, so that the strengths, as well as practice dilemmas, stemming from a religious faith could be openly recognised, especially in a multi-faith context. My atheist colleague was just as passionate about the absence of an understanding of secular spirituality from social work education,



believing that its emphasis upon 'meaning making' and a sense of wonder were of fundamental importance to our understanding of what it means to be human, and how we relate to some of the existential issues and crises that face us all. This colleague agreed strongly with O'Hagan's (2001) comment that 'social work has become over-dependent upon scientific rationalism' (p.151).

Both of these insights triggered off my research interest in this field. I wanted better to understand why there was so much suspicion within social work academic and practitioner circles; I wanted to explore the theme of spirituality in its secular as well as its religious contexts to see if this could lead to a breakthrough in attitudes and understanding. I also wanted to draw into my research social justice and community perspectives, to show how a commitment to well-being accurately reflected social work values, and how a commitment to social justice allied itself fully with social work's anti-discriminatory stance at individual as well as at wider levels.

My publications demonstrate where my journey began [15], and the progress I have made over the recent decade to establish my creative and original reputation as one of the leading social work teachers and academics in this field. My contributions not only have intellectual rigour but also are accessible beyond the narrow confines of academe [5] [6] [9] [16] [17] [18], so that colleagues can appreciate the ways in which an understanding of spirituality takes them to the very heart of social work practice. Subsequently, in my more recent publications I have explored the crucial issue of workplace well-being to demonstrate its fundamental importance to, and inter-connectedness with, best practice [3] [9].

I came into social work education to make a difference through my teaching and academic leadership, and so it was particularly gratifying that this was recognised by the Higher Education Academy with the awarding of a National Teaching Fellowship and then Senior Fellowship status, for the distinctive, original and accessible contribution I have made to social work education through my study of spirituality, the ways in which it can be incorporated into the curriculum, and how it can be a driver towards best practice.

## Chapter One

### **The arrival of spirituality upon the global social work agenda.**

Although the social work profession in the UK has demonstrated a marked indifference to the theme of spirituality, in the international social work arena a different story has been emerging.

*A seminal moment in the development of social work's understanding of the importance of spirituality came in October 2004 when the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Federation of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) held their conferences jointly in Adelaide. For the first time, a major stream of papers focused on the topic of spirituality. In the same year, in its revised statement of principles, the IFSW affirmed that social workers should uphold each person's 'spiritual integrity and well-being' (IFSW, 2004). In their jointly formulated global standards, both organizations identified that spiritual issues are part of the knowledge base needed by social workers to understand human behaviour and development (IASSW & IFSW 2004). Spirituality as a core theme for social work had arrived on the global social work agenda.*

*The international dimension to these issues was well represented in the First North American International Conference on Spirituality and Social work held in Waterloo Ontario in May 2006, where all parts of Canada and the United States, as well as from India and South Africa were represented ( Nichols, 2008). In their editorial reflections on the conference, Coholic et al. (2008) commented that,*

*If we ignore the spiritual dimension of people's lives, we may be missing an opportunity to help people construct holistic narratives that accurately fit their experiences (p.42). [1:18f]*

*Critically, however, each country-specific work is concluding that spirituality and social work ... has everything to do with mainstream social work education and practice [1:20]*

Internationally, the case has now been made for its inclusion in social work curricula, even though it is still not without its fierce critics (Stoesz & Karger, 2008). The equally challenging next step is to explore how the topic of spirituality can most effectively be delivered, in ways that are pedagogically sound and professionally relevant to all practitioners. This calls for a theoretical framework that does justice to the complexity of the topic and also is grounded in current social work discourse. It is this particular challenge that is at the heart of the author's research, and represents the unique contribution he has made in this field.

Social work education and practice do not take place in a vacuum. There are organisational contexts and frameworks through which services are delivered and in which practitioners are (or should be) supported, encouraged and enabled to deliver best practice. Recent social work scandals such as *Baby Peter (Baby Peter Serious Case Review)* have highlighted examples where this has not happened, thereby emphasising the serious risks to vulnerable people when organisations do not fully support their workforce. The fundamental issue of workplace well-being, therefore, is an important aspect of the main theme of this thesis. The concept of spirituality developed by the author explores and takes with utmost seriousness this very topic. Spirituality is not just a linking or bridging concept between social work education and organisational practice: it is a unifying and enabling concept that enables best practice to be taught, understood and delivered, not only by individual practitioners but also at organisational levels.

The author's distinctive, coherent and original contribution to social work knowledge, therefore, has three main strands which inter-weave and mutually enrich each other. These strands are:-

- a) A robust pedagogic framework that locates spirituality as a core theoretical concept for social work education and practice, and demonstrates a coherent synergy between contemporary social work and spirituality discourses. The framework provides a sound pedagogic opportunity for curriculum development, and advocates a 'co-creative' pedagogy as an effective and appropriate approach for social work education;

- b) A strong emphasis upon wider dimensions of spirituality, captured in the author's 'strap-line' *Celebrating diversity with social justice*, [ 1 ] which moves the debate beyond a narrow individualism that features so strongly in much contemporary literature to a more sophisticated and complex appreciation of spirituality. Careful attention is given to both positive and negative aspects of spirituality because educators and practitioners would not give credence to an intellectual framework that seemed to ignore the very powerful negative forces that can so easily blight human relationships at several levels. It also draws upon and significantly develops some current social work theorising, and emphasises community development and the emerging topic of eco-spirituality;
- c) An insistence upon the contribution that work-place well-being makes to the effective delivery of services in general and for social work in particular. Without 'healthy' organisations, individual workers are not going to thrive, and those who depend on the organisation for services, help and support will be let down. The contribution that an understanding of spirituality can make to workplace well-being, therefore, is an important and integral strand in the author's work, and adds to the distinctiveness of his contribution to social work knowledge.

The research questions, therefore, which have permeated his published work in this field over the past decade are as follows:

**1) Critically analyse and synthesise ways in which the concept of spirituality might enhance social work education and practice;**

**2) Critically explore the development of a 'co-constructed' theoretical framework that (a) facilitates discussion around the themes of spirituality and social work education/practice and that (b) does justice to both positive and negative, religious and secular, individual and organisational, aspects of spirituality.**

The next chapter demonstrates how the author began to grapple with these questions, and highlights the distinctive contributions that his earlier publications have made to the developing knowledge base of social work in the UK.

## Chapter Two

### **The author's early contributions to the debate.**

Over the past decade the author has made a significant, coherent and distinctive contribution to the debate around spirituality and social work education. Four contributions aptly illustrate this creative journey for social work education and practice [15][13][5] [8], while contributions [9] and [14] particularly develop further his contribution to the workplace well-being agenda.

#### **a) Spirituality and social work education: arguing the case.**

As indicated in the Preface and in the Chapter 1, the early challenge was to make a case for spirituality not only to be taken seriously by social work academics and practitioners in the UK, but also to argue for its inclusion in the social work curriculum. This had already begun to happen in the USA, not least due to pressure from recently graduated social workers who complained that they had not been given any education and training to deal with issues around spirituality and religion for their everyday practice in a multi-faith context. But cultural differences between the USA and the UK mean that there is no straightforward transferability of key issues. The impact of secularity, and the determination of the social work profession to maintain its hard-won secular professional identity, led to understandable resistance and scepticism about anything that seemed to have religious (and therefore potentially proselytising) undertones. Furthermore, the case for spirituality as being important for everyone as a core element of our common humanity had still to be made in the UK social work arena. This was the challenge the author tackled in his earlier publications.[15][12]

From a social work perspective, the author offered an early definition for spirituality that was not intended to be completely comprehensive, but rather to provide a starting point for social work academics and practitioners to engage with the topic, and to see the links with their own professional discourse. The author suggested that,

*Spirituality is what we do to give expression to our chosen world-view [13:13]*

The complex issue of definitions was further reviewed in his latest publication [1] Again, the principal concern was to produce a working definition that is 'fit for purpose' for social work, and to facilitate the opening of creative dialogue.

Among some of the emerging themes for an holistic approach to the topic of spirituality (meaning, purpose; responding to the big 'Why?' questions) the author introduced a distinctive dimension that has been a coherent thread in his subsequent publications.

*This is the dimension of passion and justice... in this passionate conviction that all deserve equality of treatment and respect there is an underlying passionate spirituality that has an energy and restlessness that will not find peace until truth and justice prevail. Maybe if more of this spirituality had been in evidence in recent decades, some of the antipathy between social work...and spirituality might have been avoided. [15:38]*

With this strong emphasis upon social justice, an immediate and powerful link was made with the value base of social work, namely anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practice. Social work understands the ways in which societal systems as well as individual prejudice can disadvantage and dis-empower people. The linking of spirituality with these great social work themes was of crucial importance. First, it argued for spirituality being an ally of social work, not its adversary. Secondly, it highlighted ways in which spirituality for some people can enhance resilience and provide a positive world-view that gives meaning to people's lives, not least in connection with their 'ultimate destiny'. Thirdly, it openly acknowledged that, as with any world-view, spirituality and religion can have negative and oppressive impacts upon people, and sometimes be 'part of the problem'. As concepts, therefore, they need to be open to critique.

These themes were taken further in [13] where detailed chapters explored the links between religion and spirituality, the positive and negative potential in each of them, and the 'legislative imperatives' that require social workers to take these into account in their everyday practice. This is important to emphasise so that it avoids the impression that individuals can adopt a 'take it or leave it' approach to these themes. These discussions unpacked some of the complexities in these concepts, not least so that social work educators could begin to

appreciate the importance of making space in the curriculum to enable students to explore these issues afresh, and to see the links with their practice. It also introduced the distinctive contribution the author has made to the literature by insisting that social justice must be on the spirituality agenda, and that from a social work perspective there needs to be some 'litmus test' to judge whether or not a particular aspect of spirituality is authentic or inauthentic, a theme to which his later publications return [2].

The definition of spirituality developed by the author allows for positive and negative expressions. The world-view we choose may or may not lead us to treat other people with dignity and respect, for example. Social work educators, and proponents of workplace well-being, are invited by this definition to critique particular manifestations of spirituality and religion to assess their authenticity or otherwise. For social work this 'litmus test' is located within the core value-commitment to anti-discriminatory practice.

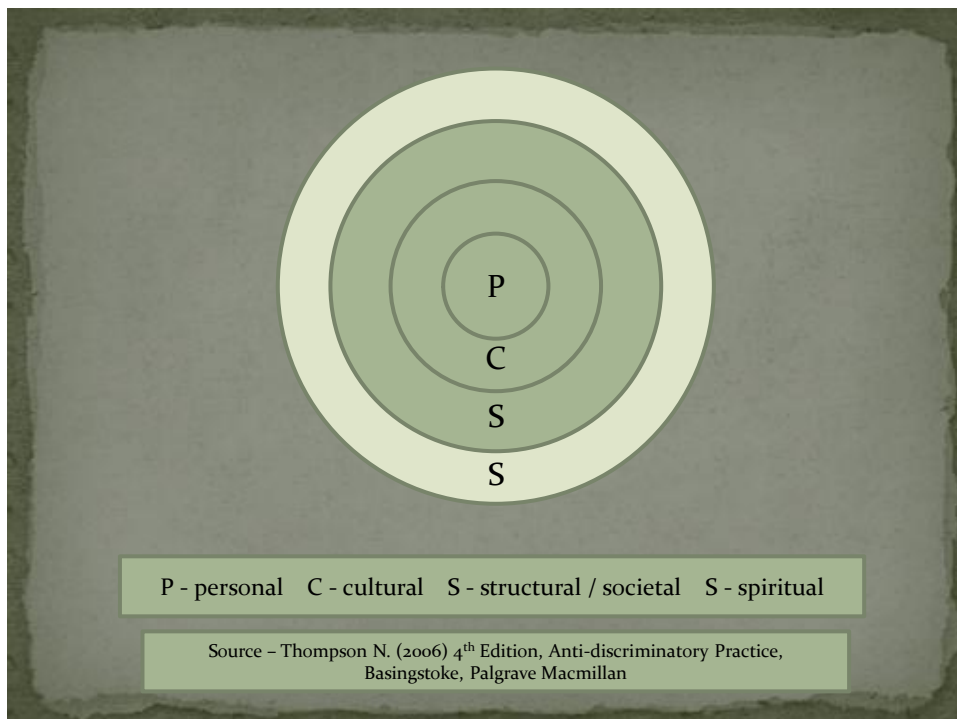
*The value base of anti-discriminatory practice is one of celebrating diversity, and this provides both a litmus test and a theoretical framework for the issues under discussion. In the past, the case against religion and spirituality has been forcibly and consistently made, and often not without good reason. I want to argue, however, that social workers should now begin to take seriously the positive possibilities of religion and spirituality, as well as fighting against the negative and oppressive expressions of it. I would want social workers to recognise that, for many people, religion and spirituality motivate and release a drive towards social justice and community capacity-building. This emphasis tends to be overlooked in much contemporary discussion on spirituality with its individualistic emphasis. [12:51]*

#### **b) Links to existing theory.**

It has been important in the author's work to demonstrate ways in which an understanding of spirituality enhances existing theoretical perspectives. One such clear link is with the PCS analysis developed by Thompson (2006), which seeks to help students and practitioners alike to understand the complex nature of discrimination and oppression.



In developing this framework further, the author has suggested first, that there needs to be a further dimension - Spiritual (S) - thereby developing it into the PCSS analysis; and secondly, that this analysis can be used not only to identify the negative aspects of discrimination and oppression but also to highlight the complex, positive, life-affirming dimensions to spirituality and religion that pervade every aspect of human life. In other words, *the spiritual (S) needs to be acknowledged as being hugely influential, for good or ill.* [12:51]



In an article published jointly with Thompson [8],

*We argued for the inclusion of spiritual perspectives...and for an awareness of spiritual perspectives in an enriched PCS analysis. By doing so we have argued not only that spirituality is of great importance in its own right; we have also made a case for seeing spirituality the gateway to the 'heart of helping' and to the gold standard of high quality, anti-discriminatory practice.* [8: Conclusion].

The author's commitment to the PCSS analysis lies in his pedagogic desire to demonstrate the all-encompassing and pervading nature of spirituality. Thompson acknowledged that *this paper would not have been produced [without] your original innovative idea that developed my thinking. All credit must therefore go to you*. (private email). This is further evidence of the author's ability to build upon and synthesise existing theoretical frameworks, and to show how they can be developed to demonstrate the positive aspects of the spirituality discourse that social work has been reluctant to acknowledge. This is seen further in the emphasis upon workplace well-being in the author's work which the next section addresses.

### **c) Workplace Well-being**

In this same article [8] another important link was made to the well-being agenda. Although *some prefer to use the phrase 'well-being' as an alternative to spirituality, arguing that it avoids some of the unwelcome associations with religion*, the author argues strongly for retaining the concept spirituality. Its clear links to well-being have been incorporated into his early contributions to workplace well-being [14] which demonstrate the wider implications of the PCSS analysis.

*For many people...well-being at work is often undermined precisely by the prejudice and discrimination which is directed to them because of their difference. This may happen at the individual level or more subtly at an institutional level...well-being and a sense of meaning and purpose cannot thrive in an environment where trust is lacking, celebration of diversity is muted and discriminatory practices go unchallenged. [14:41]*

The author has drawn on the seminal work of Zohar and Marshall (1999) whose insights into Spiritual Intelligence (SQ) form part of the background context to this thesis, and further develop the author's emphasis upon the positive aspects of the PCSS analysis.

*Zohar and Marshall argue for a deeper and more comprehensive paradigm which they call Spiritual Intelligence (SQ) which represents,*

*the most fundamental capacity which makes us uniquely human, and explains our thirst for meaning and purpose. It is our spiritual intelligence, they argue, which gives us an ultimate security upon which we can base our capacity to be innovative and creative (Moss 2004, p39).*

Zohar further argues that,

*SQ is uniquely human...It is linked to humanity's needs for meaning...[and] is what we use to develop our longing and capacity for meaning, vision and value. It allows us to dream and to strive. It underlies the things we believe in and the role our belief and values play in the actions that we take and the shape we give to our lives.*

*There are two closely linked implications of this approach to the workplace. The first is that people are wanting more and more to find meaning and purpose in their workplace, and to experience this as an opportunity for their creativity and imagination to be brought to bear upon the work they do. This is the individual and personal aspect of Spiritual Intelligence.*

*The second implication is the corporate perspective : workers look to the organisations they work for, and those who lead and manage within them, also to demonstrate creativity and imagination, and to 'flesh out' a corporate vision and dream of what they are hoping to achieve [9: 266-7]*

### **Implications for workplace well-being.**

The author argues that organisational cultures are very powerful in determining the effectiveness of service delivery. A commitment to work-place well-being will create a culture of support, encouragement, openness and shared responsibility for the achievement of the organisation's primary purpose. By contrast, an organisation that fails to trust and value its staff; that creates a culture of suspicion, secrecy, harassment and blame, will dis-empower and de-motivate the very staff upon whom the organisation, and the members of the public who

rely on that organisation for service delivery, depend. Recent events such as the crisis at Stafford General Hospital, where a culture of desperately poor standards of care for patients led to so many patients dying unnecessarily, provide powerful evidence of this phenomenon. (Mid-Staffordshire NHS Trust Public Enquiry 2010).

The author would argue, therefore, that the very same set of issues raised both by Thompson with his original PCS analysis, and the author's PCSS analysis, is relevant to workplace well-being. The development of a framework that helps people identify authentic and inauthentic spirituality in the workplace is therefore imperative to demonstrate how an understanding of spirituality enhances and enriches workplace well-being, and touches the heart and core of any organisation's culture and purpose.

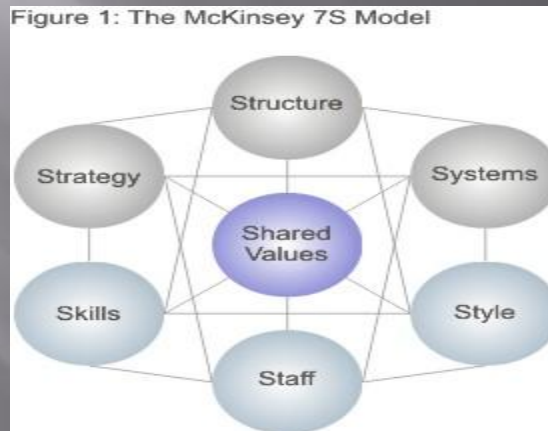
The author has felt it to be important, nevertheless, to adopt a similar approach to developing a framework for spirituality and workplace well-being as he adopted towards social work education and practice. The PCS analysis provided a starting point, and was developed by the author into a PCSS analysis, *precisely because* it was familiar territory for social work education and practice in the UK and beyond. It demonstrated ways in which an understanding of spirituality enriched, deepened and synthesised previous theoretical frameworks.

Using the insights gained from this process, the author then looked at workplace well-being to develop a similar approach, based upon an organisational theoretical framework that would be familiar to theorists and practitioners. Again, the purpose was to demonstrate the ways in which an understanding of spirituality could deepen, enrich and synthesise existing models and frameworks, as well as highlighting the fundamental implications of authentic and inauthentic spirituality for an organisation's culture.

The author's original and distinctive contribution involved exploring how McKinsey's **7 S** model (Waterman, 1980) is used to analyse an organisation. This model identifies 'hard' and 'soft' themes that need to be held together in a creative tension by the leader(s) and manager(s) if the organisation is to be fully effective. The 'hard' elements consist of strategy, structure and systems, while the 'softer' elements include the shared values, skills, staff and style. The framework developed by McKinsey is inter-active and inter-dependent, suggesting that if any

one of the seven elements were to be ignored, then the well-being of the organisation as a whole would suffer.

## McKinsey 7 S model – understanding our organisations



The implementation of the **7S** model is an important challenge to leaders, whose principal task in any organisation is to establish an appropriate culture. It is at this point that the author applied his own developed PCSS analysis to this organisational scenario, in order to identify the contribution that an understanding of spirituality can make from both positive *mission-enhancing*, and from negative *mission-destroying* perspectives. He makes clear links with earlier research, which emphasizes the importance of workplace well-being for individual worker satisfaction and for organisational effectiveness and 'output'. An important dimension to this has been the clear link with the Spiritual Intelligence (SQ) discourse with its emphasis upon meaning, purpose, creativity and vision, and the centrality of treating everyone in the workforce with dignity and respect. These themes clearly resonate with the author's own framework, and have been further enhanced by the Work Foundation report, *Exceeding Expectation* (Tamkin, 2010) exploring the principles of outstanding leadership,

**to enable a strong shared sense of purpose to be developed across an organization...to put flexibility and humanity first. Outstanding leaders passionately and constantly**

invest in their people and use the challenges presented every single day to encourage growth learning and engagement. (Executive summary).

In synthesizing these themes the author argued that the 'spirituality discourse' is important *precisely because* it raises all of these issues in a holistic way, and should not be seen as something of a minority interest. The 'spirituality discourse' therefore has a similar profound impact upon workplace well-being as it has upon social work education and practice. This led the author to develop the McKinsey **7S** model into an **8S** model in order to demonstrate the importance of spirituality to this domain, as illustrated below.



This original and innovative theoretical development was delivered, by invitation, to a prestigious event organised by the Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Medicine (MEDEV) Subject Centre of the Higher Education Academy, U.K., in June 2010, under the theme of *New*

*forms of leadership for medical and health professions' education?* co-led by Professor Judy McKimm and the author. It represents a significant, original, theoretical development and contribution to the wider 'spirituality discourse'. It also has great relevance to social work organisations seeking to deliver effective services, and emphasises the contribution that an understanding of spirituality can make to workplace well-being. The author argues that,

*Workplace spirituality, and the associated concept of Spiritual Intelligence, offer a framework or paradigm within which everyone in an organisation can begin to grapple with the big questions of meaning and purpose in the workplace, and the contribution that everyone can make to its well-being and success.*

*When taken seriously, therefore, workplace spirituality will no longer run the risk of being rejected as irrelevant, but rather will be welcomed and celebrated as a key to success.[3:151-2]*

## **Conclusion.**

This chapter has shown how the author in his earlier publications argued the case for including spirituality in the social work curriculum by demonstrating some key themes that are common to both social work education and spirituality. Crucially he identified the passion for social justice as being an important motif in the 'spirituality discourse' which has made his own work distinctive. He also developed theoretical connections with the widely respected theoretical perspective known as PCS analysis, but has argued for a spiritual dimension (S) to be added to it. Furthermore, he offered a distinctive original development to their theory by arguing that a PCSS perspective can be particularly effective in evaluating the positive life-enhancing, strengths-perspective aspects of spirituality alongside the important understanding of the complex impact of negative discrimination and oppression. The positive aspects of spirituality can also be seen in the workplace well-being agenda, where the contribution of Spiritual Intelligence and the author's **8S** model can play a major role in workplace well-being at individual and corporate levels.

These earlier publications not only demonstrate originality, synthesis and coherence in tackling these themes: they also lay the foundation for the development of a more comprehensive theoretical framework that lies at the heart of this doctoral thesis. The next two chapters, therefore, explore the development of this framework, first from a methodological perspective, and then exploring the 'co-created' outcomes of the research project.



## Chapter Three

### Methodology and Method

The research questions that have both underpinned and driven the author's publications and research in the area of spirituality and social work are,

- 1) Critically analyse and synthesise ways in which the concept of spirituality might enhance social work education and practice;**
- 2) Critically explore the development of a 'co-constructed' theoretical framework that (a) facilitates discussion around the themes of spirituality and social work education/practice and (b) does justice to both positive and negative, religious and secular, individual and organisational, aspects of spirituality.**

This, of course, begs the question as to whether spirituality could, or even should, have such a role in social work education and practice - or more specifically, whether the author's own developing conviction that spirituality has such a role to play was shared by others in the social work field. These controversial issues have been addressed frequently in the author's publications [1][2][12][13].

His first decision, therefore, was to explore the extent to which spirituality featured in existing social work curricula in England, and how this topic was understood by academic colleagues working in these programmes. A brief questionnaire was sent out to 48 social work programmes in 2003, asking for information about these issues, and requesting details of a relevant academic colleague who would be willing to discuss these issues in more detail through a telephone survey. 30 programmes (62%) identified a key academic colleague to whom the author could speak.

The author found that 26% of the programmes did not tackle these issues at all; 46% included them in core modules around values and celebrating diversity, or as part of modules dealing with death, dying and bereavement; only 10% had specifically designated workshops. In the

telephone interviews, responses suggested that there was general confusion between religion and spirituality, and that the negative aspects of religion – how women and various minority groups are often treated, for example – made these particularly challenging topics to explore in the curriculum and in practice. One consistent theme to emerge from this study was the need for a theoretical framework which would help students and staff to identify the key themes of their social work discourse that took seriously the positive and negative aspects of spirituality, in both religious and secular contexts.

These findings prompted the author to seek a methodology that was appropriate to meet this challenge. He was particularly committed to ensure that a service user and carer perspective was included. As Smith (2009) notes,

**However well-intentioned are social work practitioners and academics, their ability to determine ‘what counts’ as legitimate and sound knowledge about service users’ lives is no longer taken for granted. (p.75)**

With service users who experience mental health difficulties arguing strongly for spirituality to be taken seriously by professional workers (Gilbert 2011;2007), the author was keen to adopt a methodology that enabled key players to explore together (1) how the spirituality discourse might enrich social work theory and practice; (2) how to develop a framework for spirituality which contextualised the main themes of social work; and (3) demonstrated the ways in which an understanding of spirituality both underpinned and enhanced these important themes. As Smith (2009) argues,

**Social work knowledge does not come from the outside but is developed, explored and analysed from within the interactive process. (p.28)**

The author was also persuaded by the pedagogical principle espoused by Hodge & Derezotes (2008:108) who suggest that, unlike a modernist didactic approach, a postmodern pedagogic style is far more appropriate for the study of spirituality. They argue that,

**The concept of the instructor as expert has been de-emphasized in favour of a more egalitarian power relationship between teacher and student (Kilgore, 2004). Rather**

than transferring their expertise in a knowledge base that represents the interests of culturally dominant groups, instructors facilitate learning from the posture of co-learner (Jardine, 2005).

This led the author to decide upon an Action Research approach, which Reason and Bradbury (2001) define as,

**A participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview...it seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions...and the flourishing of individual persons and their communities(p.1).**

Furthermore, this approach has

**the overall aim...to generate knowledge, and on the basis of this, to adapt or change the project on an ongoing basis.( Hart & Bond 1995). It is an approach that emphasises collaboration and participation. (May, 2002:268).**

Advocates of this methodology clearly feel comfortable talking about themes such as meaning, purpose, quest for life, and making the world a better place, themes that resonate with the author's work on spirituality. Reason (1994:10), for example, suggests that,

**another characteristic of a participatory worldview is that meaning and mystery are restored to human experience, so that the world is once again experienced as a sacred place ... a participatory worldview locates the practical response to human problems in its necessary wider spiritual context (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p.11).**

This approach to epistemology emphasises the shared 'co-created' approach to generating new knowledge, in contrast to **the divisive epistemology of the positivist worldview [that] separates and objectifies the subjects of research activity... the participative worldview argues that human beings are engaged in 'co-creating their reality through participation'. (Baldwin, 2001, p.288).**

Denscombe (2003) further emphasises the practical orientation of action research,

**which is geared to changing matters, and its commitment to a process of research in which the application of findings and an evaluation of their impact upon practice become part of a cycle of research. (p.73)**

an approach summarised by Reason & Bradbury (2001) as research *with* rather than *on* people, **where action researchers do not treat participants as subjects but empower them to act on their own behalf as active participants in making changes.** (Bowling, 1997:366)

The author chose an action research methodology, therefore, because it facilitated a learning/pedagogic approach within the research process. A detailed understanding of spirituality was not a 'given' for the participants: the research process was in itself an epistemological journey of discovery, learning and mutual understanding, where 'the process is the product'. (Patton, 2002:436), and where the researcher interacts with the subjects,

**so that they...contribute directly both to hypothesis-making, to formulating the final conclusions and to what goes on in between ( Heron, 1981, p.19).**

This 'co-creative' approach also drew upon the work of Cottam & Leadbetter (2004) whose 'co-creative' approach to service delivery offered a valuable way forward to tackle this pedagogic challenge.

*Significantly, their thinking is grounded in practice. Their primary concern was to develop an approach to service delivery that side-stepped the somewhat patriarchal and bureaucratic ('we are the experts – we know best') stance adopted by many service delivery agencies. Instead, they argued for a 'co-creative' style, whereby everyone involved in a particular situation worked together to devise approaches and solutions that met people's needs effectively. Their 'co-creative' approach to service delivery and other activities lays great emphasis upon the shared wisdom and creative expertise of everyone who has an interest in the eventual outcome, a process which Needham and Carr (2009) refer to as 'co-production'. Such an approach clearly reflects the value base*

*of social work that recognises individual dignity, and seeks to work in partnership with people in empowering ways. In other words, it emphasises that the journey towards a solution is as important as the eventual outcome.*

*Adopting a 'co-creative' approach to this pedagogic challenge had several advantages. First, it was 'familiar territory' for practitioners, students and service users to engage with this project...It gave power and permission to everyone to be fully involved...Secondly, it also ensured that local contexts and cultural characteristics appropriately influenced the discussions, and were incorporated into the expertise of the group. Thirdly, it acted as a counter-balance to self-appointed or organisational 'experts' in the field of spirituality who might wish heavily to influence the outcome of any curriculum or practice development. It is clearly essential that any outcome reflects and embodies the value base of social work that celebrates diversity. [2]*

The author believed, therefore, that this 'co-creative' Action Research approach to developing a theoretical framework for spirituality and the social work curriculum would help to ensure that,

*(a)it was inclusive and helped everyone to 'own' the topic; (b) did not limit discussion to religious perspectives, but also (c) gave opportunities to discuss religious perspectives in a context which was predominantly secular; and (d) avoided giving easy answers by 'parachuting down' a ready-made curriculum that participants might not 'own'. If spirituality is an aspect of being human rather than an esoteric interest which appeals to just a minority, then it was important to start where people were, with their questions and concerns, their hopes and interests, and to build on that foundation, with academic staff playing more of a participative and facilitative, rather than a didactic, role. Indeed there were occasions in this project where academic staff felt they were floundering, while students, service users and carers were able to explore the territory with much greater confidence. [2]*

As Beresford (1999) notes,

**The introduction of service users' knowledge into the discussion...brings into the arena a crucially different relationship between experience and knowledge and between direct experience and social work...discourses (p.3).**

Inevitably there are limitations to this methodology. By definition, Action Research focuses on particular and immediate issues relevant to a particular group or community, and seeks to 'co-create' practical solutions. There is no guarantee, however, that such solutions will have wider applicability, or that a different group might not come up with different solutions. Furthermore, the selection or self-selection of participants will not guarantee that they are fully representative of the wider community. To achieve this, an effective survey-methodology would need to be adopted with appropriate statistical measures in place. The cyclical nature of knowledge-generation at the core of Action Research does not provide a lengthy time-frame for critical, in-depth reflection upon some of the solutions they have 'co-created'. To achieve this, more in-depth qualitative approaches, using semi-structured follow-up individual interviews with the participants, would be needed. Although proponents have argued strongly for high quality research criteria (McNiff & Whitehead (2009) for example) critics of Action Research have sometimes challenged its academic rigour and have questioned the standard of data interpretation compared with other more traditional methodological approaches. The issue of external validity, therefore, is a further limitation, as there is no use of control groups or similar approaches to test out the findings in a wider context. Torbert (1981), however, would counter-argue by suggesting that

**analytical validity is not the only, nor the final, criterion of truth. A political criterion of validity – does this information help me to act more effectively in given situations? – and an ontological criterion- does this information help me to experience more directly my-real-situation in-the-world? -complement the analytical criterion of validity – is this information internally consistent and externally replicable? (p.346)**

O'Brien (1998) notes that, in Action Research **the leader makes no attempt to remain objective, but openly acknowledges their bias**, a view which could be used to challenge the validity of the eventual outcome. Indeed, Somekh (1995) suggests that **the outcomes are**

**dependent upon those chosen by the author**, although proponents of Action Research argue that the leader's contribution to the 'co-creative process' is essential, and that this role, far from detracting from the eventual outcome, is of fundamental ethical importance in ensuring that all participants are allowed to influence the work (Winter, 1996). There is a risk, however, that in the 'co-creative' process university researchers may at times feel **exposed and rudderless** (Smith et al, 2010) as a result of the empowering nature of Action Research, an observation that highlights the importance of the maturity and skill needed by the researcher in order to fulfil the leadership role effectively.

As with all methodological approaches, limitations are not necessarily weaknesses, but simply highlight what the chosen methodology can, and cannot achieve, and where complementary approaches are necessary to enrich, confirm, and on occasion challenge and further develop, the findings and outcomes of the original project.

## **Method**

The first stage adopted by the author was to organise in partnership with the Higher Education Academy Social Work and Social Policy Subject Centre (SWAP) two national symposia on the subject of 'Spirituality, Religion and the Social Work Curriculum', as part of the author's National Teaching Fellowship Project. This invitation generated a wide cross section of 50 academics, students, service users and carers, and practitioners. Enrolment via SWAP ensured that information about gender, race, ethnicity, religious affiliation (if any), and disability was available to the author to ensure a variety of perspectives and backgrounds was achieved. (for details, see 2:58).

Part of each symposium was devoted to general discussion in small groups on the principal research question of whether the concept of spirituality might enhance the social work curriculum. This led to a vigorous set of discussions on the relationship between spirituality and religion; positive and negative aspects; the importance of secular perspectives, and the significance of legal imperatives and practice guidelines which require social workers to take these issues seriously. The main issues from each group were recorded by an appointed 'scribe'.

The second part was devoted to suggestions of how to incorporate such discussions into the curriculum and more specifically to ways in which theoretical frameworks could be devised. Several diagrammatic representations were devised and 'captured' on flip charts.

The second symposium had a similar format, the only difference being that in the second part of the discussion participants were invited to discuss, comment and build upon the findings of the first symposium and to see if an agreed theoretical framework was beginning to emerge.

Significantly, although participants warmed to the development of the PCSS analysis, they felt that a theoretical framework needed to reflect the rich complexities of the topic and its relationship to the social work discourse. They therefore spent time working on diagrammatic representations that sought to do justice to this complexity. These diagrams became powerful reflective tools in the 'co-creative' process, and provided a focus for discussions that could so easily have become diffuse.

The detailed process of the development of the framework is explored and critiqued in [2], but at this point in the discussion it is important to emphasise the role taken by the author in facilitating this 'co-creative' process, as this is an important element in the originality of his work and pedagogic approach. The various participants in the project were themselves on a journey of discovery in exploring the relevance of spirituality to their individual learning and organisational practice, or to their experience as service users and carers. As Patton (2002) notes,

**Action research explicitly and purposefully becomes part of the change process by engaging ... people... in studying their own problems in order to solve those problems.**  
(p221)

Without a commitment on the part of the author to the organisational well-being of their working groups on this journey of discovery, it is unlikely that a satisfying outcome (that is, a theoretical framework that they could 'own' and see as being relevant) would have been achieved.



The next phase was to 'road test' and further develop the framework through a series of focus groups. With very limited resources of time and money available, the author took pragmatic decisions to work locally with three groups: practitioners, service users and carers, and social work students. The author wanted to hear from each of these three groups what their views were about spirituality, social work education and practice, and also to encourage them actively to contribute to the 'co-creative' process of developing the theoretical framework that had been initiated in the national symposia. The opportunity to contribute to important developments in social work education was part of the invitation to join which participants appreciated.

The author was acutely aware that unlike the national symposia where very few participants knew each other, the three focus groups contained some people who knew each other, or worked together as a team. Krueger (1994) notes that,

**For years it was considered ideal if participants were complete strangers...People who regularly interact...present special difficulties...familiarity tends to inhibit disclosure.  
(p.18)**

On the other hand, the author felt that a 'co-creative' methodology was an important skill for teams to learn, and that with an emphasis on the shared development of a theoretical framework rather than personal disclosure there would be built-in 'safety constraints'. Ground rules to this effect were laid down, with a reminder about confidentiality and mutual respect for personal beliefs.

An independent colleague was invited to take notes. The first group were unwilling to have their discussions tape-recorded, although they were happy to have a note-taker present and for their flip chart recording to be taken away as a contribution to the final project outcome. The author decided, therefore, to keep to the same format for the remaining focus groups to maintain an equality of approach. This did mean, however, that there was a risk that not every contribution was fully taken into account.

Pragmatic and financial considerations meant that the author undertook the role of moderator for the three groups. Whilst recognising that strict neutrality would be difficult, he deliberately adopted (in Krueger' phrase) the *Seeker of Wisdom* role,

**to obtain understanding, insight and wisdom...assumes that the participants have that wisdom and that if asked the right questions they will share it (p.105).**

This approach reflects the value base of a 'co-creative' approach. It also emphasises that the principal role of the theoretical framework is to facilitate discussion, to bring spirituality into the heart of social work education, and to demonstrate the connectedness of spirituality to mainstream social work discourse.

The framework was subsequently used by the author as part of a Problem Based Learning (PBL) project in his teaching with social work students on the theme of spirituality and social work practice, and in training workshops for local authority social workers and social care workers. The framework has also been used in a Master's social work seminar series at the University of York.

The author nevertheless acknowledges the limitations of this research. It was modest in its scope; it was undertaken over a period of time when the author was deeply committed to a heavy teaching and administrative work load which limited the scope of the research project; the financial resources available to the author were extremely limited, which meant that it was not possible to involve every participant throughout the 'co-creative' process, or to bring back into the final stages of the process those who had been involved in the earlier symposia. The three focus groups were all local to the author's workplace and could not be regarded as being fully representative. To achieve this, a comprehensive survey would be necessary to explore how social work programmes have engaged with the framework, and the extent to which it is proving to be 'fit for purpose'. Another important stage therefore will be to 'test out' the framework in a more comprehensive way, especially with groups who are initially sceptical about these issues, and to explore the possibility of developing other frameworks.

The service user and carer involvement in the project was also limited and cannot be deemed to be fully representative. **'Service users are a large and diverse group. They do not necessarily have shared experiences, understandings or agendas'** (Turner & Beresford 2005, p6). A similar comment needs to be made for the practitioners and students involved in this action research.

Further limitations were the absence of systematic in-depth discussions with individual participants using semi-structured interviews. This would have provided a richer vein of data, and would have tested out the extent to which participants may have felt unable to voice minority views.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the acknowledged limitations of the research, the author believes that the process was robust and achieved successful, albeit limited, outcomes to the research questions. The chosen methodology enabled participants to respond creatively to the challenge to engage in a debate about spirituality from both religious and secular perspectives, and to participate actively in the 'co-creative' process of developing a framework which they and the author believed to be fit for purpose. Such participation, Reason argues,

**can empower them...to see that they are capable of constructing and using their own knowledge ( 2001, p.10).**

Nevertheless there is a clear understanding that,

**in a practice discipline like social work, knowledge is not really fixed but is continually generated, revised and improved upon. (Smith 2009:28)**

In the next chapter the 'co-created' theoretical framework will be explored and critiqued.

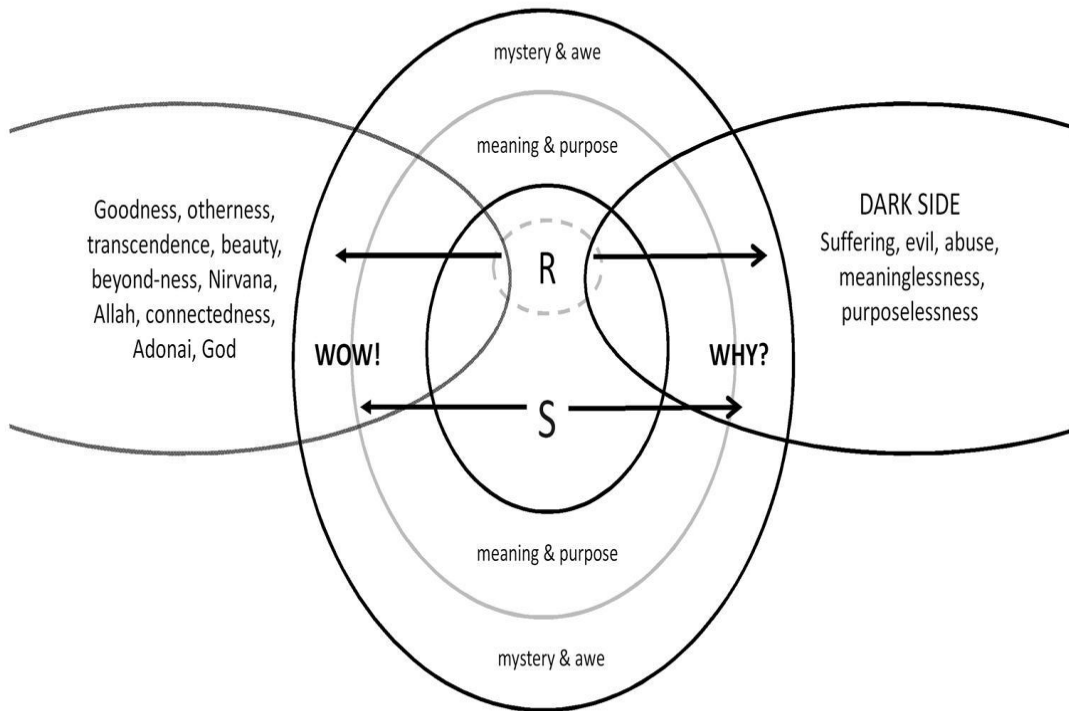
## **Chapter Four**

### **The framework: discussion and critique**

The author has already argued that his principal objective has been not only to make the case for including spirituality in the UK social work curriculum. He has also advocated the development of a theoretical framework that is pedagogically sound as well as being relevant to contemporary social work practice, both at the individual level and also at the organisational delivery level, with an emphasis upon the importance of workplace well-being.

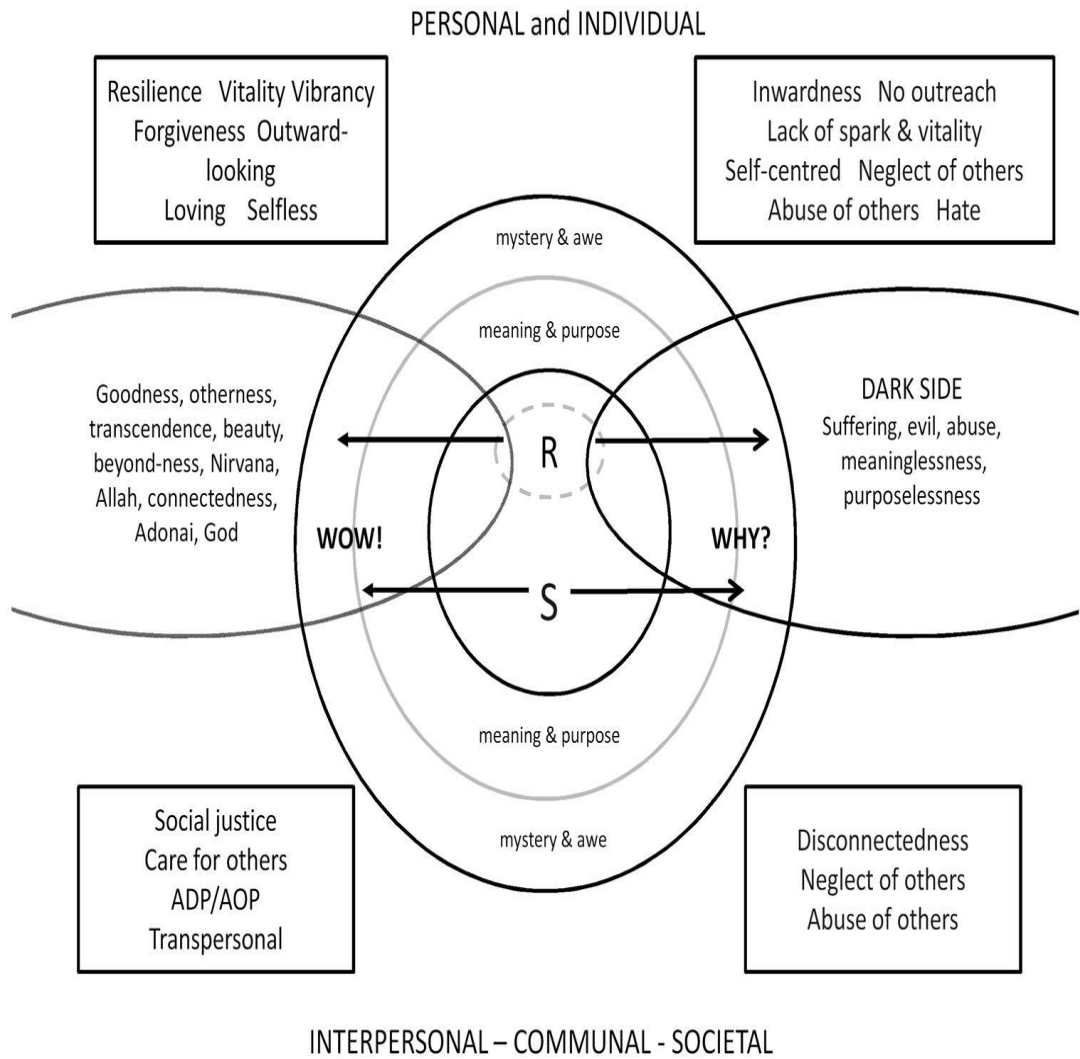
### **The framework emerges**

The culmination of the project to develop a framework can be seen in the final two diagrams and pictorial representations developed by the project. The first of these, (see below, and discussed in [1] in more detail) suggests how the main themes identified can be incorporated into the framework.



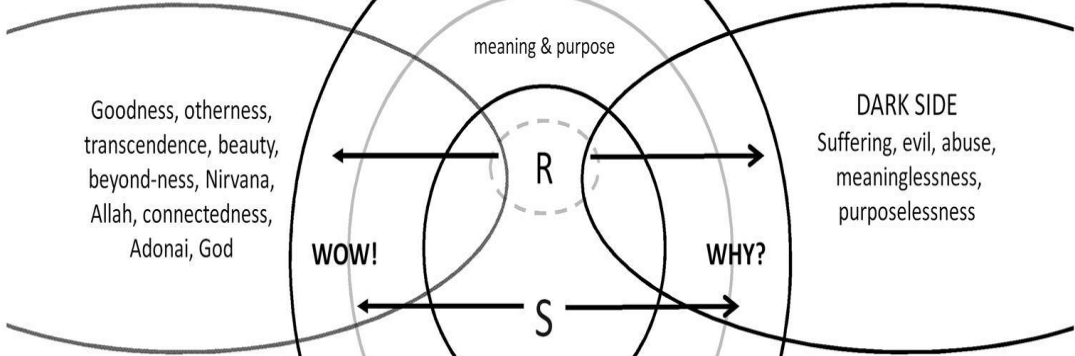
Onto this framework the participants then added some of the key concepts familiar to social work education and practice, as shown in the two diagrams below, in response to the plea from Holloway (2007) that,

*unless we are able to make such connections between the spirituality discourse and other discourses in social work...we run the risk of spirituality and social work being an exclusive and ultimately marginalized agenda item instead of an important contribution to its core business [1:23]*



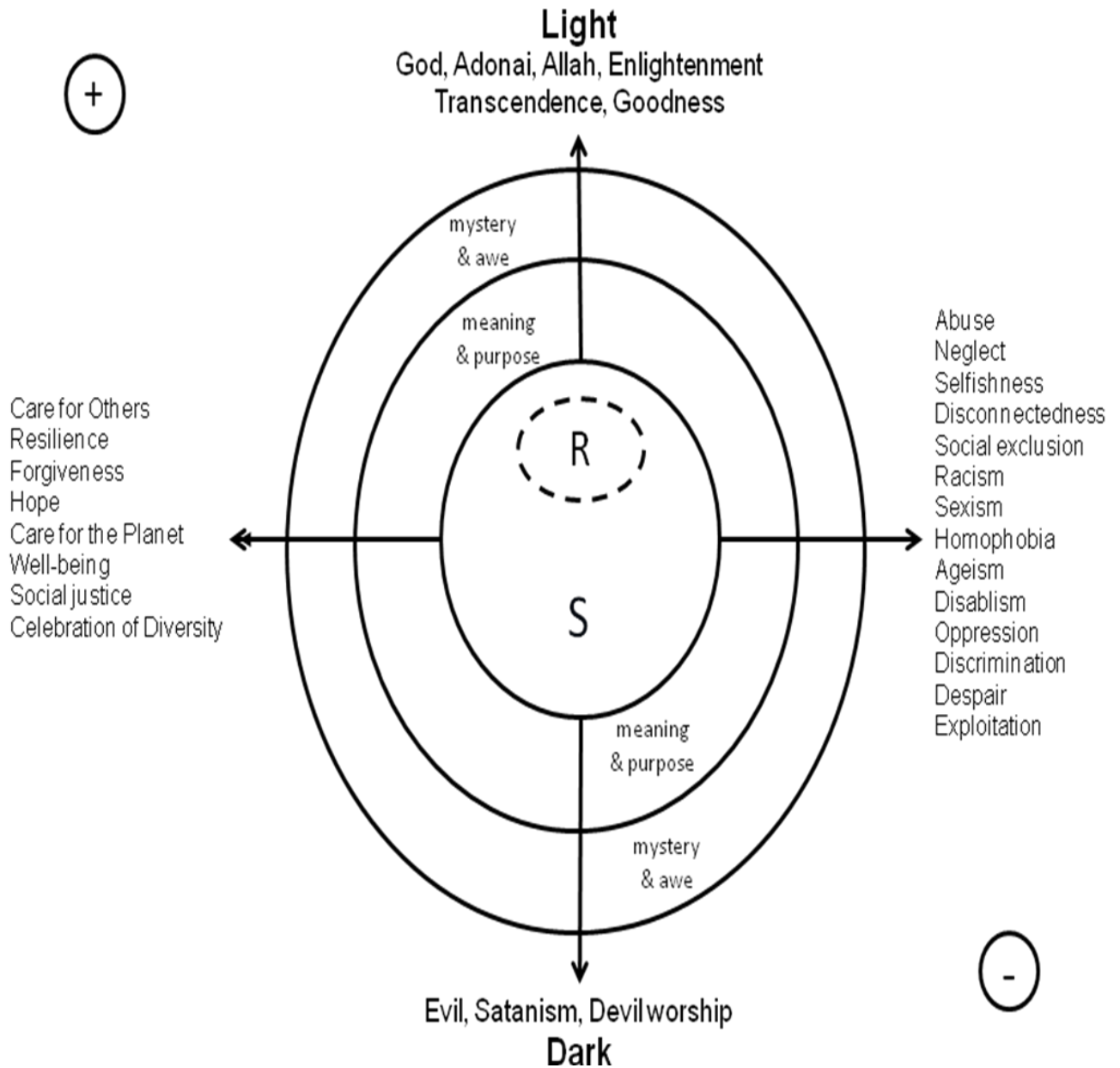
Resilience Vitality Vibrancy  
 Forgiveness Outward-  
 looking  
 Loving Selfless

Inwardness No outreach  
 Lack of spark & vitality  
 Self-centred Neglect of others  
 Abuse of others Hate



Social justice  
 Care for others  
 ADP/AOP  
 Transpersonal

Disconnectedness  
 Neglect of others  
 Abuse of others



The two final 'co-created' diagrams are by no means finished 'polished' products: they are, however, an example of how a 'co-creative' approach located some of the main themes of social work practice and the deep themes emerging from the discussions. The somewhat 'messy' appearance replicates the flip-chart 'creative scribbling and explorations' that characterised the sessions. The groups tried hard to 'co-create' a framework that reflected both individual and corporate perspectives, and took due account of the issues raised in the personal, cultural, and structural perspectives of the PCS analysis and the author's further development into a PCSS analysis. Significantly in the second diagram they attempted to streamline the framework to illustrate more starkly how the major themes of social work practice could be located on it, and to demonstrate the comprehensiveness and relevance of an understanding of spirituality to the mainstream knowledge base of social work education and practice.

A more detailed discussion of the framework is given in [1:44-5], where the key themes about the relationship of religion to spirituality; meaning and purpose; mystery and awe are related to the positive (Wow!) and negative (Why?) dimensions of human existence.

*One further point deserves mention. In this chapter considerable emphasis has been placed upon the importance of meaning-making. But neither spirituality nor religion can be packaged neatly and tidily as some meaning-making 'fix'. In both secular and religious ways we are also pointed 'beyond'. Mystery, awe, transcendence are all meaningful terms to us whether we approach life from a religious or secular standpoint.*

*Herein lies the richness, the challenge and the frustration of this term spirituality. It reminds us that there is always 'more'; always 'something beyond' that we cannot 'put our finger on', but is nevertheless tantalisingly witnessed to by the 'ache' within.[1] pp 44-45.*

The framework, therefore, not only recognizes very explicitly the profound issues about oppression, discrimination and abuse; it equally explicitly 'maps out' the range of positive life-



affirming, strengths- and resilience-enhancing, dimensions to spirituality, and the un-measurable, (perhaps even indefinable) but nevertheless hugely important experiences of awe, mystery, joy, transcendence and wonder. It is this holistic PCSS approach to the 'spirituality discourse' that places the author's work at the cutting edge of contemporary theorizing about spirituality.

This holistic approach, however, raises a further set of profound questions. Unlike some populist approaches which see spirituality as a 'good thing' and religion as a 'bad thing', this framework recognizes the complexity of these powerful phenomena. Both can be forces for good or evil. But this in itself poses the question as to whether there is an 'authenticity litmus test', at least as far as social work education and workplace well-being are concerned. If one person's world-view and spirituality leads them into abusive, disrespectful behaviours, then - leaving aside the legal implications of any such behavior - a value judgment has to be made. This judgment can be summed up in the question about whether there can be authentic and inauthentic expressions of spirituality.

This is a theme which the author has addressed in his most recent publication [2], arising from discussions on this topic with various project members as they sought to 'co-create' the framework.

### **Authentic and inauthentic spirituality.**

*These concepts were raised by participants who believed strongly that there can be both authentic and inauthentic expressions of spirituality. Inevitably this involves a set of value judgements, and the ability to distinguish between (on one hand) a laissez faire approach that says all religions and spiritualities are equal; and (on the other hand) a judgmental approach that ranks them in a particular order of excellence or efficacy. Participants also recognised that personal decisions on these matters are sacrosanct: a commitment to a celebration of diversity must be authentic and genuine. Social workers must not impose their own personal values upon others, even when their world-views differ significantly from those held by their service users. Nevertheless, from a social work*

*perspective, some sort of litmus test was felt to be necessary in order to take into account the oppressive, abusive aspects of human behaviour. The concepts of authentic and inauthentic spirituality in this framework, therefore, suggest that any behaviours that stem from a person's particular world-view or spirituality that demean, oppress, abuse or devalue people, individually or collectively, should be appropriately deemed as inauthentic, whereas those aspects of spirituality which enhance and empower an individual's value and worth, and foster their resilience and strengths, should be regarded as authentic. This approach fits well with the central commitment of social work to anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice... [2]*

This discussion has led the author to propose a contemporary 'strap-line' for social work education and practice that encapsulates the key themes of the framework: *Celebrating diversity with social justice*. In [1] he notes that,

*The linking of 'celebrating diversity' with 'social justice' we would argue encapsulates the heart and values of social work, and may indeed be seen as an expression of the profession's 'spirit'. It is a commitment to these linked themes and values that 'makes us tick'; it is the denial of them that stirs up in us not only our human compassion, but also our indignation and anger; it is also the vision that sustains and nourishes us in challenging and difficult times.*

*There are limits to the extent that diversity can be celebrated, and these limits are contained within the value base of social work that eschews oppressive discriminatory behaviour and anything which diminishes and demeans another human being. So, for social work, we are bold to claim that an authentic spirituality acknowledges, and operationalises, both aspects of this statement. Furthermore we would argue that any world-view that undermines either or both aspects represents an inauthentic spirituality. Such a position is unashamedly values-led and makes no claim for neutrality or even-handedness; it is*

*nevertheless the core of our professional value base, and is an important expression of the spirit of social work.*[1:148f]

This concern about authentic and inauthentic spirituality resonates with some wider societal critiques such as Bauman's (2007) commentary upon 'liquid modernity' and the impact of consumerism upon human values and relationship. This suggests that the deepening interest in spirituality is, in some ways at least, a movement of the human spirit that refuses to be limited by, or to be defined by, economic restrictions, consumerist pressures, political constraints or ideologies. Spirituality, in other words, takes us deeper into the territory of what it really means, or can mean, to be fully human, both individually and collectively. [2:14]

*Some recent theorists, however, (Crisp 2008; Zapf 2005; Coates, Grey & Hetherington 2006 in particular) have broadened and deepened the debate by raising some profoundly challenging issues not only about the context of all of our people-work, but the very environment in which this practice is undertaken. Furthermore, this environment, they argue, is not to be regarded as a mere context, or just the scenery and backdrop for our human drama, but as a crucial 'player' in the process, and therefore an important feature in the community dimension of all social work. (Holloway & Moss, 2010, p.157)*

In a deep sense all of this has brought us back to the basic fundamental questions that we suggested lie at the heart of a contemporary understanding of spirituality. *Who am I? What does it mean to live in relationship with others? What meaning and purpose can I find/bring to my living?* Now we can add a further dimension, captured in Zapf's poignant question, *How can I live well in this place?* And, *what is my relationship to, and my responsibility for, my environment?* Zapf later takes this further by suggesting that an even deeper understanding of spirituality would take us to the question of "what does it mean to live well **as** this place, thereby rejecting the fundamental distinction between person and place in favour of a unifying spiritual connection ( p.238) As a 'gateway' word, therefore, spirituality opens up all these questions for us, and

suggests that a full answer – insofar as we will ever find one – must include community-based issues such as social justice and a care for the planet in whatever ways seem relevant in our differing contexts. [1:163]

This brief overview of some of the issues emerging from the contemporary debate about spirituality ‘maps out’ the emerging territory for contemporary social work education and practice in the UK which,

*has far too long been guilty of neglecting spirituality, and as a result it has a lot of catching up to do with the rest of the social work world if its stated commitment to holistic care is to be taken seriously. [1:19]*

The author’s published work and his ‘co-created’ theoretical framework provide an important opportunity to facilitate this ‘catching up’ process.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has demonstrated the author’s significant, original and creative contribution to the theoretical understanding of the ways in which spirituality can enhance and enrich individual and organisational culture and practice. The framework that has been ‘co-created’ and developed under his leadership also clearly locates the positive and negative aspects of human behaviour, and has provided a benchmark or ‘litmus test’ to evaluate the extent to which any expression of spirituality, at an individual or organisational level, can be authentic or inauthentic. Throughout the discussion attention has been maintained upon the relevance of the framework both to social work education and training, and also to the wider context of workplace well-being without which the delivery of services would be seriously compromised.

*As social workers we need also to see beyond the ‘dispiriting’ material conditions of people’s lives to the possibilities for growth, renewal, connectiveness and wholeness in communities and systems. It is not possible (or necessarily desirable) to lift people out of their environment of origin, but ‘living well in this place’ challenges us to facilitate*

*transformation of those things which cause alienation into that which creates integration and connection. [2:180]*

*This journey into the relatively unknown territory of social work and spirituality is, we suggest, a new way of 'knowing' fit for purpose when facing the challenges of contemporary social work. [2:183]*

In chapter 5 the author will indicate briefly the ways in which his work can be developed further.

## Chapter Five

### Potential further developments

The 'spirituality discourse' is not static: as befits a newly emerging major theme in contemporary 'people-work', new contributions are being offered internationally to deepen and enrich our knowledge and understanding. The author readily acknowledges that further work could well further modify and develop the framework, but in his view it is sufficiently robust to merit inclusion in his most recent publication [1] as the culmination of his work in this particular field.

One potential development of the author's work is to explore ways in which this framework can be used to demonstrate the importance of spirituality to a wider range of 'people-work' disciplines. The author believes that this framework is relevant to other professional disciplines including health and social care; youth and community work; the police, probation and prison services. The issues raised by the framework are challengingly relevant to the training and education for all these professional disciplines.

The author's commitment to 'co-creative approaches' to education around spirituality has persuaded him that neither a didactic nor a purely literature-based approach would be pedagogically appropriate. This was demonstrated to the author's satisfaction not only through the 'co-creative' methodology adopted in developing the framework, but also through a similar approach to delivering 'spirituality education' generally. In [17] he discusses his use of Problem Based Learning, for example, as a pedagogic 'tool' that he believes to be particularly appropriate for exploring spirituality. His 'co-creative' approach also raises the possibility of a range of other frameworks being developed in response to the research questions that the author has posed for his own research and publications.

A further development is the use of the framework in the context of workplace well-being. It has been argued throughout this thesis that workplace well-being is a *sinequanon* for best practice: poor workplace well-being not only hampers the commitment to, and delivery of, high quality services; it can also dis-empower and de-motivate individual workers, leading to

stress and even 'burnout'. The **'8S'** model developed by the author has already proved to be an effective 'starter' for discussions and training events around these important themes. A further stage in the development of the framework, therefore, would be to demonstrate how the major issues in workplace well-being can be clearly located upon, and be enhanced by, the author's framework, using a 'co-creative' process to identify and explore the key themes (both positive and negative) of workplace well-being.

One further important development to the author's work would be a systematic evaluation of the usefulness of the framework to a variety of social work and other people-work educators and practitioners. Preliminary feedback from early usage suggests that tutors, student and practitioners find the framework a very positive learning and teaching tool, but more evaluative work is needed once the framework becomes more widely known through the publication of the author's most recent book in 2010. [1].

## Chapter Six

### Conclusion: the claim for doctoral recognition

The range of peer-reviewed publications, upon which the author's claim for doctoral recognition is based, has been accepted by the University as demonstrating *prima facie* evidence that the author's work enjoys and merits international academic recognition for creative, original contributions to knowledge in his chosen field, and deserves consideration for doctoral recognition.

The first research question, designed to analyse and synthesise ways in which the concept of spirituality might enhance social work education and practice, enabled the author to produce a series of publications that not only tackled *head on* some of the UK social work profession's hesitations and objections to this topic being on the curriculum, but also argued strongly for its positive, enriching advantages. He demonstrated the ability to build upon, synthesise and develop some existing theoretical perspectives in the social work literature that enable an understanding of spirituality to deepen and enrich their contribution to social work theorising and practice. Significantly he has been able to explore both positive and negative aspects of spirituality in religious and secular contexts, and to argue that this complexity, linked to an awareness of authentic and inauthentic spirituality, is essential to a mature reflective approach.

One of his distinctive contributions to social work knowledge, therefore, is the clear link he has made between individual practice and workplace well-being, demonstrating ways in which a positive understanding of spirituality can facilitate and enhance this symbiotic relationship, whereas a negative understanding can undermine or even destroy effective practice.

In a similar way he has shown how an understanding of spirituality can deepen and enrich social work's international commitment to social justice, encapsulated in his '*strapline*' *Celebrating diversity with social justice*. Throughout his published work the community dimension of spirituality has been a distinctive feature and a major contribution to knowledge in this field, contrasting to some other authors who frequently emphasise only the individualistic aspects of the topic.



The importance of his publications, and the distinctive contribution they have made to social work knowledge, has been acknowledged by one of the world's leading authorities in this field, who writes that

**As the principal investigator of the International Study of Spirituality and Religion in Social Work Practice (ISSRSWP), I have found Bernard Moss's work to be especially helpful in providing a unified understanding of the complexities that religion and spirituality bring to the fields of human services delivery, research, and education. Bernard Moss's careful and logical examinations of religion and spirituality have been used to inform the many publications that my colleagues and I have published in the US, the UK, and in other international venues.**

**I have also used Bernard's text, *Religion and Spirituality*, in the classroom, where its personable, clear, expository style, is appreciated by academics and students alike.**

**In summary, Bernard's work has had a positive influence on research and teaching, not only in the UK, but in the US, Norway, and New Zealand.**

*Leola Dyrud Furman, MSW, PhD; Associate Professor Emeritus of Social Work, University of North Dakota; Adjunct Faculty at Augsburg College and the University of St. Thomas, Minneapolis, MN; and Principal Investigator of the ISSRSWP.*

His distinctive emphasis upon epistemological and pedagogic implications sets his work apart from other authors in this field, many of whom make practical links between religion and social work practice (Furness & Gilligan, 2010; Mathews, 2009) or (more widely) between spirituality and social work (Canda & Furman, 2010; Coates, 2007); or between spirituality, life rituals and a sense of place (Crisp, 2008). But no other author provides a systematic, 'co-created' pedagogic framework for social work education as outlined in this thesis.

In tackling the second research question, about critically exploring the development of a 'co-created' theoretical framework, the author has adopted and developed a relevant action research methodology involving a range of key 'players' in the field of social work education and practice. These include service users/carers; social work students; practitioners and academics. This innovative 'co-creative' approach enabled separate and distinct groups not only

to make their own contributions but to build upon work done by previous groups. The framework that emerged, although clearly still 'work in progress' and in need of wider systematic evaluation, proved successful in two main ways. First, it modelled an egalitarian pedagogy that valued the contributions from each participant, and created a safe environment in which at times very sensitive issues could be explored and debated. Secondly, the framework itself provided a robust outcome to the research question that not only satisfied the participants who brought the framework to a stage of completion, but also has proved effective in enabling students and practitioners in subsequent workshops led by the author to discuss the issues in creative dialogue. The strength of the framework lies in its ability to locate spirituality, in both its positive and negative aspects, within the mainstream social work discourse, and to facilitate an egalitarian pedagogy. These factors constitute a major contribution by the author to social work knowledge and underpin his claim for doctoral recognition.

Another distinctive feature of his submission is his pedagogical approach to the development of knowledge, most clearly articulated in the 'co-creative' approach he adopted with a wide range of participants in developing this framework. This approach demands sophisticated skills in teaching and learning, evidence of which the author has demonstrated in his publications. His ability to make material accessible to a wider audience is evidenced in his range of publications that are not limited to the profession of social work, but have a much wider appeal. [3] [4] [10] [11] [16] [18].

The 'spirituality discourse' within social work is still relatively new in the UK. The author has made significant, innovative contributions to this emerging discipline, and has pioneered a strong theoretical base upon which academics, students and practitioners can base and develop their own learning and apply it to practice.

The author's understanding of spirituality, with its clear links between social work education, practice, workplace and community well-being, points beyond the mundane to the deeper spiritual values that make organisations, and ultimately society itself, more humane. As one recent reviewer of his latest book [1] commented,

*Holloway and Moss bring us back to the soul of social work in this beautifully written book. (Gilbert P. Visiting Professor, University of Worcester).*

### List of published work relevant to this application.

- 1) Holloway, M. & Moss, B. (2010), *Spirituality and Social Work*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.
- 2) Moss, B. (2011) The Pedagogic Challenge of Spirituality: A co-creative response, *Journal of Social Work* ( 02/06/2011) , doi 10.1177/1468017310394239.
- 3) Moss, B (2009) *Spirituality in the Workplace*. Chapter 11 in N. Thompson & J. Bates, (2009) *Promoting Workplace Well-Being*. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, pp 141 -153.
- 4) Moss, B. (2009): *Ethics, Vision and Values: the challenge of Spirituality*, Chapter 6 in J. McKimm & K. Phillips (2009), *Leadership and Management in Integrated Services*, Exeter, Learning Matters, pp. 93-105.
- 5) Moss, B. (2008) Pushing back the boundaries: the challenge of spirituality for practice teaching, *Journal of Practice Teaching and Learning: Social Work: Health: Nursing, Vol.8 (3) pp 48 – 64*.
- 6) Moss, B. & Thompson, N. (2008) *Meaning and Values: developing empowering practice: A learning and development manual*, Lyme Regis, Russell House Publishing.
- 7) Moss, B. (2007) *Values*, Lyme Regis, Russell House Publishing.
- 8) Moss, B. & Thompson, N. (2007) Spirituality and Equality. *Journal: Social and Public Policy Review 1.1.2007. (unpaginated paper)*.
- 9) Moss, B. (2007) Towards a Spiritually Intelligent Workplace. *Journal of Illness Crisis and Loss Vol. 15 (3) pp 261-272*, Special edition on *Grief and Loss in the Workplace*.
- 10) Moss, B. **Guest Editor**, Special Issue of *Journal Illness Crisis and Loss* on theme of Spirituality. Vol. 15(2) 2007, Guest Editorial pp 83-87.

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- 15) Moss, B.** (2002) *Spirituality: a personal perspective.* Chapter 2 in *Grief and Loss – a Guide for Human Services Practitioners*, N. Thompson, (ed) Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.
- 16) Moss, B.** (2010) *Responding to Loss: a Learning and Development Manual*, Lyme Regis, Russell House Publishing.
- 17) Moss, B.** (2010) In the end, it needed a cunning plan: pedagogic reflections on the teaching of spirituality to social work students. *Discourse: the Journal of the Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies, Vol. 9 (2) pp 13-28.*
- 18) Moss, B.** (2008) *Communication Skills for Health and Social Care*, London, Sage.

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