An exploratory study of aesthetic judgment, spirituality and ethical mind-sets

Theodora Issa*

School of Management, Curtin Business School, Curtin University of Technology, Perth Australia E-mail: Theodora.issa@cbs.curtin.edu.au

Dr. David Pick

School of Management, Curtin Business School, Curtin University of Technology, Perth Australia E-mail: David.Pick@cbs.curtin.edu.au

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Profile: Theodora Issa is currently a full time PhD student at the school of Management, Curtin Business, School, Curtin University of Technology, Perth, Western Australia. Theodora's PhD topic is ethical mind-sets, spirituality and aesthetic judgment in the Australian Services Sector. Theodora has postgraduate qualifications from Western Australian Universities, (i.e. Master of Business Administration (MBA – UWA), Master of Electronic Commerce (MEC – MURDOCH) and Master of Management Research (MMR – UWA)). Theodora maintains vast industry experience, held several positions, in banking, trade, insurance, charitable and teaching organisations; in addition, Theodora currently is a teaching associate at the School of Management, Curtin University.

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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines the results of a pilot survey relating to ethical mind-sets, spirituality and aesthetic judgment in an Australian business context. The aims of this pilot study are: firstly, to test the use of an online survey tool compiled from a review of multidisciplinary literature; and secondly, to evaluate the appropriateness of the statements within the survey tool to the Australian business context. The survey is composed of eighty-nine statements; to which participants respond using a five point likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, followed by a section of questions for the collection of demographic data to allow the generation of descriptive analysis. Despite the limitation of this pilot study in the small sample, the pilot study has achieved its two main aims. Whilst the small sample make generalisation difficult, the survey generated some interesting results that raise significant questions regarding the relationship between ethical mind-sets, spirituality and aesthetic judgment in the Australian business context.

Keywords: ethical mind-sets, spirituality, aesthetic judgment, online survey tool, pilot study.

INTRODUCTION

This examination of ethical mind-sets, spirituality and aesthetic judgment is based on the ethical decision-making model developed by Jones (1991) and a study of personal moral intensity conducted by Granitz (2003). This paper describes the results of a pilot study for a larger online survey focussing on ethical mind-sets, spirituality and aesthetic judgment. It is anticipated that this research might assist the services sector in Australia to improve their approach to ethics in business-related matters and contribute to the theoretical debate about the teaching of ethics in management, business ethics in general and ethical mind-sets in particular.

Spirituality has been the subject of several studies in the USA, but not as many in Australia, with notable exception of work by the St. James Ethics Centre. Whilst being an old philosophical expression, aesthetic judgment, has also received little attention in the management literature. Even fewer studies have attempted to examine both together. One notable example is Lane and Klenke (2004) who refocus existing research to address the influence of uncertainty on leaders in the dynamic global environment; and suggest that both spirituality and aesthetic judgment amongst other factors would be considered as part of the ambiguity tolerance interface cluster for leading under uncertainty, which is the hallmark of this contemporary age. The ambiguity tolerance interface cluster is a modification of McCormick's (2001) self-regulatory leadership

confidence model; concentrating on the variables: ambiguity tolerance, spirituality, creativity, aesthetic judgment and mindfulness. Further, the need to address issues about spirituality is examined by Ashar & Lane-Maher (2004), who posit that a relationship exists between business success and spirituality, which raises the questions about the existing business paradigm. With regard to aesthetic judgment, Hicks (1999) posits that aesthetic needs are not limited to artists or the elite: "Most of us are interested in harmonious forms wherever can be found - in people, in nature, and in objects of daily use". Further, Shapshay (2005) indicates, the links that Kant himself implies between the aesthetic and the moral (in the third *Critique and the Religion*) are much stronger than generally portrayed by commentators. Not to forget Brown (2000) who discussed Kant's explication of the creation of the aesthetic idea, which in Kant's opinion prompts much thought.

In addition, Dobson (2007) indicates that aesthetics provide a unified view of the nature and purpose of business that overcomes the incoherencies and inconsistencies of the ethical or economic view of business. Dobson (2007) links aesthetics to beauty, and suggests that business people, when making business decisions need to consider more than just profitability, they should also take into account whether their decisions are also ethical and beautiful. Dobson concludes that aesthetics provide a justificatory mechanism for ethical decision-making in business, which would most probably seek the assistance of an ethical mind-set. This conclusion is supported by Haldane (2007) who indicates that the new generation has lost confidence in the values that they once shared – for example stability and certainty – in the institutions of society and in intellectual, moral, aesthetic and spiritual authority. Haldane considers that these constitute a stable social and cultural order, thus, increasing the need to examine what really activates this shift in their minds, and this might be achieved through a further exploration of ethical mind-sets.

In the wake of misconduct of big businesses¹, the dramatic increase since the mid 1990s in the unethical behaviour in the corporate world, and its extraordinary influence on the social tapestry of society, this study heeds the calls of Ghoshal (2005) who argues for the development of new paradigms in the teaching of management, and Gosling & Mintzberg (2004) who argue that companies and business schools must work together to reinvent management education, rooting it in the context of manager's practical experiences, shared insights and thoughtful reflection. These and other scholars call for higher attention to business ethics, thus the urge to take a closer

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⁽e.g., AWB, HIH, OneTel and others in Australia, Enron, Worldcom and others of the USA and many more around the world

look as to what lies behind such failures in the business world in an attempt to answer some of the serious questions that are raised.

DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

Spirituality

It is no secret that the influence of spirituality on individuals has taken a priority in several fields of study other than theology; medicine, psychology, sociology, and more recently management. In the area of Management, Fry (2003) notes the accelerating call for spirituality in the workplace, and discusses the transformation and development in the organisation through spiritual leadership. In a recent examination of the studies on spirituality and health George et al. (2000) concluded that since the turn of the century there has been increasing interest and excitement in exploring the relationships between spirituality and health, and recommended that the field of spirituality is wide open in terms of the potential and significant contribution to a wide range of disciplines, including management. Reave (2005) indicates that the following practices have been emphasized in many teaching spirituality, and they have also been found to be crucial leadership skills: showing respect for others, demonstrating fair treatment, expressing caring and concern, listening responsively, recognizing the contributions of others, and engaging in reflective practice. In addition, and following a study of relevant literature, Reave (2005) identified four components of spirituality (support, integrity, compassion and honesty), which form the base of examining spirituality and its relationship with ethical mind-sets. Further, Reave (2005: 33) conducted a comprehensive study of different definitions by several scholars and defined spirituality as, "an innate and universal search for transcendent meaning of one's life". This is supported by Haldane (2007) who argues that there is evidence of a growing need to search for meaning in life. Whilst Ashar & Lane-Maher (2004) analyse different definitions of spirituality and especially spirituality at work, the work by Reave (2005) appears to be the most appropriate framework for researching spirituality in the context of this study.

Aesthetic Judgment

Whilst aesthetic judgment has received relatively little attention from management scholars, there are increasing calls from different scholars such as Dobson (2007), Haldane (2007), Lash (1994), Paul (1993), Ramirez (2005), and Werner (1997) to examine this variable especially with the

ongoing dramatic technological changes, combined with the ambiguity in organisations and in corporate life in general. Those scholars stress on the relationship between this variable (i.e. aesthetic judgment), morality, ethics and even spirituality. Further, Tateosian (2004) examines aesthetic judgment and in a recent research identifying four components (parsimony/thriftiness, harmony, balance and pursuit of truth). Whilst there is little empirical research relating to "aesthetic judgment" in the business context, the four components identified by Tateosian (2004) are a good starting point for researching aesthetic judgment in an Australian business context.

Ethical mind-sets

Mind-sets, paradigms, and frames, are three different concepts used by scholars interchangeably to describe mind-sets. Reporting on a pilot survey about the role of ideas in the workplace Rothberg (2004), concluded that ideas contribute to the achievement of high performance, excellence, and competitive advantage in management and organizations. Rothberg goes on to argue that in order to intervene and facilitate these favorable outcomes, managers need to be aware of how ideas are affected by the mind-sets they use and what is actually happening to ideas in these managers' workplaces. It is presumed that how managers engage with ideas in the workplace will reflect the mind-sets that they bring from the theory and practice of management, and these mind-sets might not be adequate. Rothberg (2004) further argues that there are four paradigms or mind-sets: scientific paradigm, experiential paradigm, translation paradigm, and the uncertainty paradigm, which accommodates the search for conventions and paradigms. This paradigm emphasizes the human capacity to reason, imagine and learn, generating conventions in the process of dealing with uncertainty and changing them predictably over time. In another study in Management Kibort (2004) summarizes Gosling and Mintzberg's (2003) five mind-sets: managing self (the reflective mind-set), managing the organization (the analytical mind-set), managing context (the worldly mind-set), managing relationships (the collaborative mind-set), and managing change (the action mind-set). Although these scholars have studied different forms and types of mind-sets, there is no specific literature, or empirical evidence in relation to the ethical mind-sets or the role of spirituality and aesthetic judgment in ethical mind-sets. With the overall framework of this research being uncertainty and based on the above, in this study, ethical mind-sets are defined as the ability to practically and wisely develop and interpret criteria based on ethical methods or notations held by a person to allow this person choose ethically.

METHOD

Sample

Participants were invited to take part in this research via e-mail. This e-mail invitation gave full details and a systematic document on how to complete the online survey. Throughout the correspondence participants were assured that their participation was voluntary, on an anonymous basis, and that they were not required to respond to all the statements in the survey. In addition, it was made clear to them that they could withdraw anytime. Thirty-three people were contacted of whom twenty-four (73%) completed the survey. Of these 57% were male and 43% were female, with 67% working with the same employer in excess of three years. This sample was derived from the services sector (property industry services, education, finance, research and development, and tertiary education).

Instruments and Measurements

A range of measures² were deployed in the survey to ensure the collection of rich empirical data. The survey was designed with those measures in mind, the contents of the indices from the literature were studied and the most appropriate derived from them, while others were added following the thorough research in the multidisciplinary literature in an Australian business context. Consequently, this study employed valid measures of spirituality, personality attributes, survival in the modern society, and aesthetic judgment used by Ashmos & Dunchon (2000), Askegaard (1997), Boudreau (2003), Johnston (1995), Koeing (2000) and Martin (2005). In addition, statements composed based on the components of spirituality and aesthetic judgment as identified by Reave (2005), and Tateosian (2004) were used to develop the survey. The instrument is an online survey of four sections, with eighty-nine statements to which the participants responded using a 5-point likert scale specifying the number that best indicates their agreement or disagreement with the statements. This was followed by eight demographic questions to allow the generation of descriptive data, as detailed in the following table:

Sections	Contents
Section 1	Individually responsible ethical mindsets
Section 2	Team oriented ethical mindsets
Section 3	Spiritually ethical mind-sets
Section 4	Aesthetically ethical mind-sets
Section 5	Demographic information

Table 1 – Summary of the online survey contents

² E.g. Ashmos & Duchon (2003) Spirituality questionnaire, Boudreau Burnout Questionnaire − BBQ 1998, 2003 The Duke University Religion Index (DUREL) ©1997, The index of Core Spiritual Experience (INSPIRIT) by Kass (1991), Bamossy, Johnston, and Parson's (1985) Aesthetic judgment ability scale (AJA)

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

The data was analysed using SPSS, Microsoft Excel SIGMA Stat, and PLS softwares (Chin, Marcolin & Newsted 2003). Overall, the findings demonstrate the usefulness of these packages to examine the different constructs used in this survey. For example, Table 1 outlines four figures generated using SPSS. This table illustrates that participants tended to respond to the statements in relation to the components of spirituality positively (i.e. strongly agree, or agree). However, when the more direct phrases that might examine their relationship with God or a higher power appear in the statement (e.g. prayer, miracle etc.) the response to these statements was either neutral or more towards the lower end of the Likert Scale. This indicates that the respondents are influenced by spirituality, but not necessarily spirituality that is generated from religious values.

Individually Responsible Ethical Mind-Set Statement(1)

		Frequenc y	Percen t	Valid Percen t	Cumulativ e Percent
Vali	agree	5	20.8	20.8	20.8
d	Strongl y agree	19	79.2	79.2	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Individual Achievement Ethical Mind-set Statement (4)

		Frequenc y	Percen t	Valid Percen t	Cumulativ e Percent
Vali d	Strongl y disagree	2	8.3	8.3	8.3
	disagree	8	33.3	33.3	41.7
	neutral	5	20.8	20.8	62.5
	agree	8	33.3	33.3	95.8
	Strongl y agree	1	4.2	4.2	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

Spiritually Ethical Mind-Set Section A statement 3

		Frequenc y	Percen t	Valid Percen t	Cumulativ e Percent
Vali d	Strongl y disagree	6	25.0	25.0	25.0
	disagree	4	16.7	16.7	41.7
	neutral	6	25.0	25.0	66.7
	agree	4	16.7	16.7	83.3
	Stongly agree	4	16.7	16.7	100.0
	Total	24	100.0	100.0	

These were the responses to the third statement in the first part of section 3 which states "Prayer is an important part of my life"

Spiritually Ethical Mind-Set Section B statement 14

		Frequenc y	Percen t	Valid Percen t	Cumulativ e Percent
Vali	agree	16	66.7	66.7	66.7
d	Stongl y agree Total	8	33.3	33.3	100.0
		24	100.0	100.0	

These were the responses to the second statement in the second part of section 3 which states

"INTEGRITY" is a value I care to see apparent in my boss

Table 2 – Samples of descriptive analysis generated through SPSS

In addition to the generation of descriptive data, measures of significance, validity and reliability were produced. Whilst Leech, Barrett & Morgan (2005) argue that statistical significance is strongly influenced by sample size, Chin, Marcolin & Newsted (2003) demonstrate that using BETA PLS software can overcome some of the shortcomings associated with using small samples. The statistics produced indicated that while item mean is high at 3.757, the inter-item correlations is very low at 0.174, which indicates that the different items in this survey tool are measuring different constructs (i.e. spirituality and aesthetic judgment).

With regard to validity, Table 2 demonstrates that the measures used in the survey are valid. With the exception of the first two sections, the alpha α is very high, especially when compared to the original measures from the literature. In addition, the reliability statistics for the eightynine statements of the survey demonstrate a high alpha α , thus confirming the reliability of this tool.

Item – representing sections within the online survey	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
Individually responsible ethical mind-set – section 1	.15	.218	5
Individual accomplishment ethical mind-set – section 2	.225	0.30	6
Spiritually ethical mind-set - section 3A	.508	.389	15
Spiritually ethical mind-set – section 3B	.916	.913	16
Spiritually ethical mind-set – section 3C	.797	.808	16
Aesthetically ethical mind-set – section 4A	.836	.863	9
Aesthetically ethical mind-set – section 4B	.835	.841	6
Aesthetically ethical mind-set – section 4	.955	.961	16

Table 3 – Alpha "α" calculated using SPSS- by different sections and as an overall figure for 89 statements of the online survey

Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items

Cronbach's Alpha

N of Items

In addition, different correlations or relationships were examined using PLS BETA software; the figures indicate a negative correlation between the statements in two sub-sections of the survey. These statements were seeking responses in relation to the components of aesthetic judgment (thriftiness, harmony, balance, and pursuit of truth) (Tateosian 2004) and the components of spirituality (support, integrity, compassion, and honesty) (Reave 2005). The participants

responded mostly positively, for these thirty-two statements, thus, allowing the strong validation of the measures (the components of spirituality and aesthetic judgment) as presented in the literature. In addition, high correlation figures were recorded when determining the relationships between different sub-sections within those relating to spirituality and aesthetic judgment. This indicates internal validity of the statements used within each section of the survey. However, when it came to examining the correlation between the two main constructs (spirituality and aesthetic judgment), the correlation figures were very low, indicating a high degree of construct validity.

Acknowledging the limitations of this pilot study, the results generated demonstrate that researching spirituality, aesthetic judgment and ethical mind-sets in the Australian services sector is worthy of further exploration. Consequently, this tested survey tool will be employed on a larger sample of those working in the Australian services sector. This will contribute to the ongoing debate in business ethics regarding the need for new approaches to research, teaching and practice in business.

DISCUSSION

The main limitation of this study is the small sample size, which limits the inferences that can be drawn from the statistical analysis. Despite this limitation, this study has important implications, and the analysis of the data generated some interesting theoretical and methodological questions. The concept of spirituality has a number of issues attached to it. Whilst participants would acknowledge being spiritual, when the statements discuss support, compassion, integrity or honesty, however, when the statements would associate spirituality with the religious beliefs (e.g. prayer, miracles etc.), the participants would respond mostly towards the lower end of the scale. This indicates that the mind-sets of those surveyed would have spirituality as a component, but not necessarily religious spirituality. This challenges much of the literature (mainly from the USA), that associates spirituality with religion³, and often confuses spirituality with religion. This could be attributed to social and cultural differences as Australian is perhaps more secular than American society. This is supported by Gilhooly, et al. (2007) in their study on good health in old age in Scotland in which they argue that Scottish society is far more secular than that found

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³ For example in medicine: Luckhaupt, Sara E., MD; Yi, Michael S., MD, MSc; Mueller, Caroline V., MD; Mrus, Joseph M., MD, MSc; Peterman, Amy H., PhD; Puchalski, Christina M., MD; Tsevat, Joel, MD, MPH, 2005. Billings, David; Doede, Robert Paul; Hughes, Kevin L; Hughes, Paul Edward; Johnson, Daniel; Katerberg, William; Milbank, John; Moltmann, Jurgen, Smith, James K.A.; Volf, Miroslav; Wolterstorff, Nicholas, 2004. And, a thesis by Thorell, Kathleen Murray that mixed up between spirituality and religion, 2003.

in America. This feature may well be reflected in the case of Australian society that has a significant Anglo-Celtic influence. Consequently, the results of this research suggest "secular spirituality" as a phenomenon. Further, this study clearly presented that there are differences between the two main concepts "spirituality" and "aesthetic judgment", thus future research with pre-specified definitions will help generate meaningful results in the study of mind-sets, and specifically ethical mind-sets.

In terms of methodology, this study provides insights into some of the key issues raised by scholars in relation to the lack of empirical evidence of the appropriateness of online survey tools. Coupter (2001) expressed worries about the lack of empirical studies on the effect of format or design on the levels of unit and item response or on data quality when it comes to online surveys. This argument is developed by Kieman et al. (2005) who conclude that with the increase in computer users, web-based surveys (online surveys) can be used easily and there is a possibility of online surveys being more effective than mail surveys. Allen & Lofferda (2006), outline lessons in relation to the conduct of online surveys: first, the use of online surveys saves time, enhances productivity and the impact can be measured. Liu (2007) agrees with this lesson and adds that the online (Web) survey has the advantage of reduced cost when compared to mail-out surveys. Second, communication has a measurable impact on behaviour, and is more important than deadlines in driving behaviour. Third, the initial launch communication of an initiative has the greatest impact on participation, this lesson is supported by several other researchers in the online survey (e.g. Crawford, Couper & Lamias 2001; Gendron, Suddaby & Lam 2006; Wharton et al. 2003). The fourth and final lesson is prime your audience. Let them know what is coming and when it is coming. While this pilot survey had taught the researcher these lessons, it revealed additional issues. Preparing for an online survey is time consuming, issues that must be dealt with include: dealing with technicians, establishing common ground as to what is required, why and by when, and interacting with participants on a continuous basis. However, it can be concluded here that the use of online survey is at least as efficient and effective as a mail survey.

CONCLUSION

This paper outlined the results and analysis of a pilot study that examined ethical mind-sets, spirituality and aesthetic judgment in an Australian business context. Despite its limitations, this pilot study has achieved its two main aims; firstly, the online survey tool is valid and can be used in further research. In addition, this study validated the use of the online survey technique.

Whilst the small sample makes generalisation difficult, some interesting results were generated. In this study, it is demonstrated that the two concepts "spirituality" and "aesthetic judgment" are distinct and those surveyed rated their various components differently. In addition, it is possible that spirituality does not necessarily go hand in hand with religion, whereas the mind-set might be impacted by spirituality, it is not necessarily a spirituality that is generated from religious values. This raises issues in relation to the complexity of spirituality, and the relationship between ethical mind-sets, spirituality and aesthetic judgment such as what might be the relationship between the spirituality and aesthetic judgment in the ethical mind-sets of those working in the Australian service sector. The findings from this study call for further exploration of the nature of the ethical mind-sets and the diverging threads of spirituality – one secular and one religious. Clearly then, this pilot study validates the survey tool, and strengthens the argument which sets up the foundation for further research to examine the ethical mind-sets with the use of this tool on a large population sample.

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