

## THE INSPIRED SALESPERSON: LINKING SPIRITUALITY TO PERFORMANCE

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*Despite the pervasiveness of spirituality, few empirical studies exist which assess its relationship with critical business outcomes such as performance. Recent research into inspiration suggests a linkage between sources of inspiration, such as spirituality, and the resulting motivation to accomplish goals. In this study, organizational commitment and spirituality are assessed as sources of inspiration, and inspiration's relationship with performance is also investigated. Thus, inspiration is positioned as a mediating variable. Additionally, the direct relationship of organizational commitment with performance is examined. Empirical results show that inspiration fully mediates the effect of both organizational commitment and spirituality on performance. A sample of salespeople employed at automobile dealerships in the southwest United States was used to test the model. Managerial and theoretical implications are discussed.*

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### INTRODUCTION

Does the presence of spirituality affect performance in business organizations? Some scholars argue that spirituality can have a positive influence on performance in organizations (Hamel & Breen, 2007; Mitroff, & Denton, 1999). The "quest for spirituality" has been called "the megatrend of this era (Aburdene, 2007, p.4) and "a heightened sensitivity to spiritual concerns has become one of the defining characteristics of modern culture" (Emmons, 1999, p.4). Yet spirituality and the closely related concepts of religiousness (Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Scott, 1999, p. 900) (or religiosity) (Jackson & Bergeman, 2011, p. 150) and faith (Zinnbauer et al., p. 891; O'Grady & Richards, 2010, p. 57) have received limited attention in the sales and marketing literatures with the exception of a few studies that focus on its relationship with consumer behavior (Belk, Wallendorf, & Sherry, 1989; Muniz & Schau, 2005). Despite the conceptual arguments made to support a positive effect of spirituality on performance, empirical evidence is lacking to support this relationship.

It is important to understand how spirituality influences activities and outcomes in sales and marketing since "spiritual and religious goals,

beliefs, and practices are central to many people's lives and are powerful influences on cognitions, affect, motivation and behavior" (Emmons, 1999b, p.12). This paper positions inspiration as the link between spirituality and performance. This study addresses this gap in the sales and marketing literatures by investigating the nature of the relationship of spirituality with job performance, a variable of critical importance to sales and marketing professionals (MacKenzie, Podsakoff & Ahearne, 1998). Specifically, tests of the relationships of spirituality and organizational commitment to inspiration, and inspiration with job performance as the criterion variable are conducted in this study.

### CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

#### Inspiration

Inspiration has been defined as "a trait or state, triggered by internal or external stimuli, which is characterized by evocation, motivation, and transcendence," and this definition is used for this study (Thrash & Elliott, 2003). Inspiration is strongly associated with spiritual and social environment sources (Thrash & Elliott, 2003; Thrash, Maruskin, Cassidy, Fryer, & Ryan, 2010), and has been conceptualized as an antecedent of motivation (Thrash & Elliott, 2003). Motivation, which "concerns energy, direction, persistence and equifinality" (Ryan &

Deci, 2000), is generally regarded as a factor which affects job performance (Weitz, Sujan & Sujan, 1986). However, one leadership expert notes that “motivating people is a major organizational problem today” (Blanchard & Finch, 2007, p. 148).

Thrash and Elliott (2003) describe evocation as denoting that inspiration is outside the control of an individual and can be “triggered” from within or without an individual. Inspiration is characterized by motivation in the sense that after being inspired, individuals frequently direct their behavior “to” realize a desired goal (the “target”). Transcendence involves overcoming previous limitations or preoccupations (Thrash & Elliott, 2003) or becoming aware of better possibilities (Thrash, Elliot, Maruskin & Cassidy, 2010). In selling contexts, this could involve learning new behaviors or skills (Kohli, Shervani, & Challagalla, 1998) and accomplishing more challenging performance goals since inspired individuals tend to set more inspired goals and have more success in pursuing these goals (Milyavskaya, Ianakieva, Foxen-Craft, Colantuoni, & Koestner, 2012).

Inspired employees perform beyond the requirements of their jobs (Bolino, Turnley, & Bloodgood, 2002), accept increased risks (Bass, 1990), and are enthusiastic about their work (Yukl & Van Fleet, 1982). Enthusiasm contributes to a sense of engagement with one’s work, and engagement in interesting activities is a characteristic of intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Inspiration precedes self-determination (Thrash & Elliott, 2003), inspired individuals represent the prototype of self-determined behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2000), and inspiration is fully associated with only one type of motivation, intrinsic motivation (Thrash & Elliott, 2003), which is characterized by personal interest, enjoyment, and inherent satisfaction in the individual (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

In a sales environment, intrinsic motivation has been shown to have a greater positive effect on performance than extrinsic motivation (Tyagi, 1985). Despite the benefits inspired salespeople can bring to an organization, a review of the sales literature reveals a lack of

studies regarding potential influences on and outcomes of inspiration.

### Spirituality

Spirituality is appropriate for this study for several reasons. First, there is a widespread recognition by authors (Aburdene, 2007), scholars (Hamel & Breen 2007; Jackson & Bergeman 2011; Mitroff & Denton 1999; McCullough & Willoughby 2009; Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004; Weaver & Agle 2002), and public pollsters Gallup (Gallup & Lindsay, 1999) and Pew Research (Lugo et al., 2008) that spirituality has a deep meaning and strong influence in the lives of many people. Second, spirituality is also capable of contributing to an individual’s inspiration (O’Grady & Richards 2010; Thrash & Elliott 2003; Thrash, Elliot, Maruskin & Cassidy 2010, p. 488; Thrash, Maruskin, Cassidy, Fryer & Ryan 2010, p. 472), and can strongly influence behavior and motivation (Emmons 1999b, p. 12). A survey by The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (Lugo et al., 2008) reported that nearly 89% of the public identify themselves as religious. Gallup polls (Gallup & Lindsay, 1999) show that 95% of the public believes in God (or Universal Spirit) with large majorities feeling a need for spiritual development.

There are compelling reasons to suggest that business goals and spiritual issues are quite compatible. Sales performance is important (Churchill, Ford, Hartley, & Walker, 1985) due to its direct link to organizational success (MacKenzie, et al., 1998). Spiritual beliefs might relate to performance from the teachings found in scripture. A Christian salesperson might rely on Philippians 4:13 NIV, which states, “I can do everything through him who gives me strength.” Adherents of other faith traditions are also likely to draw on spiritual resources for empowerment in the various aspects of their daily life, including their work. The purpose of this research is to specify and test a model of two proposed antecedents of inspiration, organizational commitment and spirituality, as well as the relationship of inspiration with performance. The direct relationship of organizational commitment with performance is tested along with inspiration as an intervening variable that mediates the effects

of organizational commitment and spirituality on performance. This appears to be the first research that proposes relationships between spirituality, inspiration, and job performance. The model is tested with a sample of salespersons employed at automobile dealerships.

### Inspiration and Values

Values are conceptions of desirable ways of behaving or desirable end states (Feather, 1995). They express motivational goals (Feather, 1995) and help individuals determine the goals they wish to pursue or avoid, potentially influence behavior, and transcend specific situations (Feather, 1995; Verplanken & Holland, 2002). People naturally internalize the values and regulations of their social groups, but fully internalized extrinsic motivation rarely becomes intrinsic motivation during the internalization process (Deci & Ryan 2000). Only a small number of central values are a critical part of one's sense of self-identity, express general motivations, and actually have the capacity to drive behavior (Verplanken & Holland, 2002).

Thrash and Elliott (2004) delineate motivation and inspiration by pointing out that "it is possible to be inspired *by* without being inspired *to*." Thus, inspiration is a two stage process. The first stage, to be inspired "by" something, requires a source of inspiration to exist and corresponds to the evocation aspect. The second stage, or the "to" component of inspiration, is associated with the motivation and subsequent behaviors to achieve desired goals which would be driven by values. However, as mentioned earlier, only intrinsic motivation is fully associated with inspired individuals (Thrash & Elliott, 2003). Accordingly, the more extrinsic the source of motivation is, the less likely it is to represent truly inspired behavior.

Identifying what causes salespeople to be "inspired by," (or the "triggers") would be useful since being inspired is recognized as a requirement, but not a sufficient condition, for motivation to be present in inspired individuals. Pinpointing the triggers that eventually lead salespeople to be "inspired to" is especially desirable, since not all triggers lead to action.

In fact, these triggering processes could be attributed to different sources (Thrash & Elliott, 2004; Thrash, Elliot, Maruskin & Cassidy, 2010).

Sources of inspiration could provide the triggers described earlier. While there are many sources which could contribute to inspiration in salespeople, this study is restricted to investigating two likely sources of inspiration, organizational commitment and spirituality. The relationship of inspiration, as an intervening variable, with performance, is also investigated (see Figure 1).

## THEORETICAL MODEL

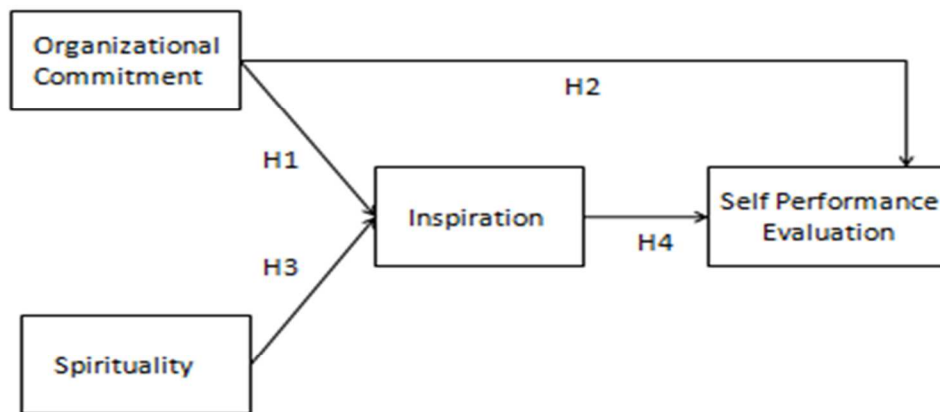
### Organizational Commitment, Inspiration, and Performance

Porter, Steers, Mowday & Boulian (1974) defined organizational commitment as "the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization" with three defining characteristics: "(1) a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values; (2) a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization; and (3) a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization." This definition is used in this study.

Organizational values could be made salient to organizational members by positive role models or "exemplary others" (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997; Thrash & Elliott, 2004), transformational leaders (Davidovitz, Mikulincer, Shaver, Izsak, and Popper, 2007), or inspirational leaders within the organization (Bass, 1990, p. 207). Because of the strong acceptance of organizational values by committed employees (Porter et al., 1974), it may facilitate the activation of central values in individual salespeople and provide motivation. These types of values are more likely to be associated with the personal interest, enjoyment, and inherent satisfaction which characterize intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Central values of the individual salesperson, which may be shared with the organization, help define one's self and contribute to one's self-identity (Verplanken & Holland, 2002), so

FIGURE 1:  
Conceptual Model of Antecedents and Outcomes of Inspiration



organizational commitment has the capacity to activate the motivation characteristic of inspiration. An organization also fulfills the requirement of a social environment capable of providing inspiration (Thrash & Elliott, 2003; Thrash & Elliott, 2004). Therefore, the following hypothesis is offered:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Higher levels of organizational commitment are positively related with higher levels of a salesperson's inspiration.

Strong belief in and acceptance of organizational goals and values, and the considerable effort on behalf of the organization characteristic of employees with strong organizational commitment reflects the higher value placed on goal attainment by salespersons in these situations. Empirical evidence has also been developed that suggests inspired individuals make better progress in goal pursuit (Milyavskaya, et al., 2012). Since performance is always a goal of sales organizations, the following hypothesis is developed:

**H<sub>2</sub>:** Higher levels of organizational commitment in salespersons are positively related to higher levels of performance in salespersons.

### Spirituality and Inspiration

Positive psychology recognizes spirituality as one of the character strengths, which are defined as "positive traits reflected in thoughts, feelings, and behaviors" (Park et al., 2004). Although a generally accepted definition of spirituality does not exist (Jackson & Bergeman, 2011, p. 150; Tsang & McCullough, 2003, p. 346; Zinnbauer et al., 1999, p. 890), most definitions seem to concur that spirituality is characterized by a desire to connect with God (or the supernatural), a sense of relatedness with others, a religious orientation, and a capacity to influence personality at the core of the individual (Emmons, 1999b; Zinnbauer et al., p. 902), and "shape behavior" (Park et al., 2004).

Several researchers claim that spirituality has motivational properties and may account for explanations of significant amounts of an individual's behavior (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003; Piedmont, 1999; Sessions, 1994). William James felt that "(B)elieving in a superior power brings a surge of energy, perseverance, and courage" (Meyers, 1986, p. 447). This effect closely parallels Ryan and Deci's (2000) description of motivation, which "concerns energy, direction, persistence and

equifinality.” Ryan and Deci (2000, p. 71) also state that “a secure relational base does seem to be important for the expression of intrinsic motivation to be in evidence.” The connection with God and others which characterize spirituality would provide that relational base to support intrinsic motivation.

Inspiration was originally associated with influence from a supernatural being (Thrash & Elliott, 2003; Thrash & Elliott, 2004), and is still strongly associated with transcendent matters such as faith and spirituality (Thrash & Elliott, 2004; Thrash, Maruskin, Cassidy, Fryer & Ryan, 2010). Spiritual transcendence is identified as a “source of intrinsic motivation that directs, drives, and selects behaviors” (Piedmont, 1999). Therefore, the relevant research in this area suggests a conceptual link between spirituality and inspiration, but not any specific work related behaviors. Thus, spirituality should influence underlying processes which affect what Paunonen (1998) calls specific responses. Because spirituality influences processes that subsequently influence behaviors, a direct effect on sales performance appears to have no theoretical support. Instead, spirituality is viewed as influencing the intermediate process of inspiration, which then has an effect on subsequent behaviors which could affect performance.

One of spirituality’s main functions is “to provide the means and ends for how life should be lived” (Emmons, 1999). This mirrors the definition of values given earlier. The Dalai Lama (1999, p.20), the leader of a major Buddhist tradition, notes that all major religions promote the same basic values. Religion can be an integral part of a person’s religiousness, and “spirituality and religiousness can (and often do) co-occur” (Hill, et al., 2000). As Hill et al. (2000) state, spirituality and religiousness are “inherently intertwined.”

Therefore, spirituality is linked to outside sources such as God and others, associated with transcendent matters, and related to intrinsic motivation. This covers the three characteristics of inspiration previously discussed of evocation, transcendence, and motivation, and provides justification for the following hypothesis:

**H<sub>3</sub>:** Higher levels of spirituality in salespersons are positively related to higher levels of inspiration in salespersons.

### Inspiration and Performance

Inspiration is characterized by a motivation to act in ways that reflect deeply held values. Most businesses focus on satisfying customer needs and embrace values in their organizational culture that reflect this. Potential for value activation to serve the needs of others is present in both organizational commitment and spirituality. Committed employees share these values, and will expend significant effort to meet the goals of the organization driven by these values (Porter et al., 1974). Thrash, Elliot, et al. (2010, p. 490) claim that the transcendent aspect of inspiration is associated with “striving toward valued goals.” As shared values become more integrated with individual employees in the socialization process, this leads to motivation that is relatively more intrinsic in nature (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Sales performance has been the subject of numerous studies. Inspired salespersons will enjoy engaging in challenging activities such as achieving sales goals because they are intrinsically motivated to do so (Ryan and Deci, 2000), and achieving sales goals should lead to higher performance. A qualitative study (O’Grady & Richards, 2010) suggests that inspired individuals are more empathetic in helping situations. The ability to be empathetic, or to see issues as a customer sees them, is mentioned as an absolute necessity for sales success by the CEO of a leading sales development firm (Stevens & Kinni, 2007, p. 70). Finally, inspired individuals set more inspired goals and make more progress in attaining them (Milyavskaya et al., 2012). These perspectives predict greater perseverance, stronger motivation, deeper insight, and more meaningful and valued goals to drive behavior. Therefore, this hypothesis is presented.

**H<sub>4</sub>:** Higher levels of inspiration in salespersons are positively related to higher levels of performance in salespersons.

## METHODS

### Survey Sample and Procedures

Salespersons belonging to a major automobile retail dealership group in the southwest United States provided the data for this study. A total of 184 surveys were distributed and 161 surveys (87.5%) were returned. Twenty-one were dropped from analysis due to excessive levels of missing data. Appropriate items were recoded, and missing values from the remaining surveys were imputed with the Expectation Maximization (EM) algorithm (Little & Rubin, 2002) using recommended procedures with PRELIS 2 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2002). A total of 140 surveys (N=140), or 76.1% of the total sales force, were retained for analysis of the measurement models and structural model.

Males comprised 85.3% of the respondents and the average age of respondents was 39.4 years. 84.6% had at least some college education, and slightly more than half were married (50.7%). The average length of employment at the dealership was less than two years (22.3 months). Ethnically, 39.7% were Caucasian, 20.6% Hispanic, 17.6% African-American, and 16.2% Asian/Pacific Islander.

Survey questionnaires were administered during weekly sales meetings at each of the organization's locations to gather the data used in testing the conceptual model. The firm's President and Human Resources Director encouraged each location's general manager a week prior to survey administration to encourage employee participation and to provide a secure, private environment for respondents to complete the survey during these meetings. Personally signed cover letters from the President/ COO of the firm and the lead researcher were included with the surveys to further reduce concerns regarding the confidentiality of responses. Local administrative managers distributed and collected the completed surveys which respondents had placed in sealed envelopes. These were shipped directly to the researchers.

The recommendations of Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, (2003) to minimize the potential effects of common method bias were followed by

methodologically separating the predictor and criterion variables by using different response formats for each, protecting respondent anonymity and reducing respondent apprehension, and improving scale items.

### Measures

Established scales were used for all measures. Spirituality was measured using the Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith Questionnaire (Plante & Boccaccini, 1997). This scale is recommended to measure spirituality at the dispositional level. This 10-item self-reported scale was modified to use a 5-point (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree) Likert-type response format. Summed scores between 10 and 50 are possible, with higher scores indicating stronger spirituality.

Organizational commitment was measured with a 7-point Likert-type scale developed by Mowday, Steers, & Porter (1979). This summated ratings scale measures the degree to which an employee reports being actively involved with their organization (Mowday et al., 1979). The scale is anchored by "1 = strongly disagree" and "7 = strongly agree." Higher scores indicated greater organizational commitment.

Inspiration was measured using the Inspiration Scale (Thrash & Elliott, 2003), a 7-point Likert scale anchored by "never" and "very often." Higher scores show greater levels of inspiration.

Performance was measured with a modified form of a scale previously used in the sales literature (Futrell & Parasuraman, 1984). This scale requires salespeople to rate themselves among 11 items on a scale of 1-7. The anchors for this scale are 1=poor and 7=excellent. Higher scores indicated higher performance.

A list of the items we retained in the scales used in this study are located in Appendix 1. The factor loadings on their respective constructs are also reported.

## RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Prior to testing the hypothesized relationships in the model using path analysis, the measures

were refined using structural equation modeling (SEM). First, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted on each measure to determine possible dimensionality, then a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using LISREL 8.72 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993) was performed on each of the measures of reflective indicators to establish the unidimensionality of the construct (Gerbing & Anderson, 1988). In the process of establishing unidimensionality, some items were dropped from several scales due to empirical or theoretical considerations as recommended when a converged, proper solution is obtained, but overall model fit is unacceptable (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988).

A CFA was not performed on the self-performance measure, since it is an index, and derives its meaning from the items. Dropping any items from a formative measure such as this could alter the empirical and conceptual meaning of the construct because “the indicators only capture the entire conceptual domain as a group” (MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Jarvis, 2005). The CFA for each construct resulted in a model exhibiting acceptable fit according to guidelines in the SEM literature for sample sizes less than 250 with CFI values close to 0.95 and SRMR values < .08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). In addition to these values, RMSEA and chi-square values are reported. After unidimensionality was established, the composite reliabilities ( $\rho$ ) and average variance extracted (AVE) for each measured construct were calculated (Bagozzi & Edwards, 1998). The lowest values for AVE (.55) and composite reliability (.91) exceeded the recommended minimums of .50 for AVE and .70 for composite reliability (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998). A summary of the correlations between the constructs, their reliabilities, and measures of fit are provided in Table 1.1.

The path analysis model was estimated using LISREL 8.72 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993) to test the hypothesized relationships in the conceptual model. This procedure was selected because it allowed all hypothesized relationships to be simultaneously tested while exceeding the minimum sample size recommendation of 10 observations per parameter estimate (Hair et al., 1998, pp.604-605). Mediation was tested using recent guidelines for SEM. Since SEM is a

confirmatory approach, tests for complete mediation do not require a hypothesized direct relationship between the initial variable and the outcome variable if there is no theoretical support for the relationship (James, Mulaik & Brett, 2006), which is the case for spirituality and performance. Partial mediation, which is expected for the relationship between organizational commitment and performance, requires the initial variable to have direct relationships with the intervening variable and the outcome variable (Homburg, Wieseke, & Bornemann, 2009, p. 73; James, Mulaik, & Brett, (2004) p. 242). Results of the model are shown in Table 1.2.

The positive relationship of organizational commitment with inspiration in  $H_1$  was supported with a standardized loading of .27 and  $t$ -value of 3.39.  $H_2$  hypothesized a direct positive relationship between organizational commitment and performance, but a standardized loading of .03 with a  $t$ -value of .34 for this path provided no support for this hypothesis.

$H_3$  tested a positive relationship between spirituality and inspiration. A loading of .26 with a  $t$ -value of 3.33 supported this. The positive relationship between inspiration and job performance in  $H_4$  was also supported with a standardized loading of .23 and a  $t$ -value of 2.65.

Based on the squared multiple correlations for the structural model, 16% of the variance in inspiration and 6% of the variance in performance were accounted for.

### Mediation Results

Inspiration was expected to partially mediate the effect of organizational commitment on performance, and to completely mediate the effect of spirituality on performance. Since  $H_2$  was not supported, the relationship of organizational commitment and performance is not partially mediated by inspiration. However, both organizational commitment and spirituality had a significant direct relationship with inspiration, and inspiration had a significant, direct relationship with performance. This suggests that inspiration fully mediates the effects of both organizational

**TABLE 1.1:**  
Correlations, Means, Standard Deviations, Measures of Fit, and Reliabilities of Scales for Constructs in the Model (N=140)

Scales	Organizational Commitment	Spirituality	Inspiration	Self Performance	Mean	SD
<b>Organizational Commitment</b>	1.00				78.8	13.5
<b>Spirituality</b>	.124	1.00			38.9	10.1
<b>Inspiration</b>	.268**	.292**	1.00		45.3	8.1
<b>Self Performance</b>	.105	.053	.315**	1.00	68.5	7.3
<b>CFI</b>	.94	1.00	.95	na		
<b>SRMR</b>	.053	.012	.041	na		
<b>X<sup>2</sup></b>	50.32	4.53	12.80	na		
<b>df</b>	5	2	5	na		
<b>p</b>	0.00	0.10	0.00	na		
<b>Cronbach's α</b>	.84	.96	.94	.88		
<b>Composite Reliability</b>	.91	.94	.93	na		
<b>AVE</b>	.55	.81	.71	na		

\*\* Significant at .01

**TABLE 1.2:**  
Parameter Estimates/ T-Values

Parameter/Relationship	Path	
H <sub>1</sub> : OC → INSP	Γ 1,1	.27/3.39
H <sub>2</sub> : OC → PERF	Γ 2,1	.03/0.34
H <sub>3</sub> : SPIRIT → INSP	Γ 1,2	.26/3.33
H <sub>4</sub> : INSP → PERF	β 2,1	.23/2.65

**Structural Model Measures of Fit**

X <sup>2</sup>	.045
P	1.00
df	4
CFI	1.00
SRMR	.0053
RMSEA	0.0

**Squared Multiple Correlations**

Inspiration	.16
Performance	.06

OC= Organizational Commitment, INSP = Inspiration, PERF = Self Performance, SPIRIT = Spirituality

commitment and spirituality on performance in this study.

**DISCUSSION**

The key finding in this study is that spirituality has a positive relationship with performance which is fully mediated by inspiration. Thus,

inspiration provides a mechanism to transmit the beneficial effects of spirituality to outcomes of interest to organizational researchers. This effect was comparable to the positive relationship organizational commitment had with performance which, in this study, was also fully mediated by inspiration. This may be the first empirical linkage of spirituality to job



performance to appear in the sales, marketing, or organizational literatures. The weak and statistically insignificant relationship between spirituality and organizational commitment in this study strongly suggests that these effects were independent of each other.

Organizations devote considerable resources to fostering environments to sustain a motivated workforce. In this study, however, spirituality, which is widely ignored or suppressed within organizations (Mitroff & Denton, 1999, p.4), provided a comparable effect relating to performance. We used self-ratings in this study to measure performance, and this practice has been controversial. The most recent meta-analysis of sales performance evaluations found that while both managerial and self-reports of sales performance have predictive validity, both types are undesirably low in predicting objective performance ratings (Jaramillo, Carrilat & Locander, 2005). Another reason self-reports are important is because salespeople who believe they are performing well reflect confidence in their abilities, and confidence has been shown to have a positive relationship with salesperson performance (Krishnan, Netermeyer, & Boles, 2002). The squared multiple correlation for inspiration's relationship with performance in the model was 6%, which is comparable to the average variance (less than 10%) accounted for by predictor variables of performance in Churchill et al.'s (1985) meta-analysis of this topic. Clearly, inspiration promotes self-perceptions of performance, and spirituality and organizational commitment each have the demonstrated capacity to inspire salespeople. Firms allocate many resources to create, maintain, and grow organizational commitment in their employees. But spirituality's influence in business settings remains relatively unknown. There are several reasons that may explain this.

Managers may feel that issues related to organizational commitment, such as identifying with organizational goals, developing affective ties to the organization, etc., may be within their span of influence and expertise. Implementing proper employee selection techniques can assist them in hiring employees whose values closely match the organizations. However, they may be uncertain or unfamiliar

with what to do to foster the beneficial effects of spirituality within an organization. A fear of offending others or violating legal statutes may dampen their willingness to address spiritual issues in the workplace.

The body of knowledge of the relationship between organizational commitment and performance is expanded by the finding that organizational commitment's relationship with performance was fully mediated by inspiration.

### **MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are three key areas that deserve managerial attention as a result of this study. First, trait inspiration measures can be used to pinpoint job candidates who are more likely to be inspired. Doing this would complement other processes designed to maximize P-O fit in the employee selection process. These employees would be more receptive to attempts to inspire them, and more likely to be motivated to act in desired ways. Second, a key implication of this study is that spirituality has a relationship with performance which is very comparable to that of organizational commitment. Organizations devote substantial resources to create environments that encourage the realization of organizational goals such as performance. Substantial resources are devoted at the organizational level to try to inspire salespeople to be motivated to consistently perform their jobs well, particularly since salespeople in general interact less frequently with their direct managers compared to other types of employees. Spirituality, on the other hand, receives very little attention in many workplace settings as a source of inspiration. Indeed, a post hoc analysis showed the variables organizational commitment and spirituality did not have a statistically significant relationship. Therefore, all positive relationships spirituality exhibited were independent of organizational influence. It is conceivable that organizational settings that promote development and expression of the spiritual aspect of employees could promote an interaction effect between spirituality and organizational commitment that enhances the overall influence on employee inspiration, and subsequently, performance.

Business organizations have adapted over the years to effectively harness the beneficial influence of ethnic and gender diversity on business outcomes. While spirituality in individuals may seem to be disparate, Smith (1979, p. 12) notes that “one is struck by similarities of religious faith, which turn out to be greater than one might have supposed.” Businesses should seek ways to encourage employees to let their spirituality influence their behavior since it is an important part of their lives. Suppressing the influence of spirituality robs businesses of its positive effect on inspiration and, subsequently, performance. If spirituality is a mega-trend in global society (Aburdene, 2005), businesses should seek to manage it to capture its beneficial effects, rather than suppress or ignore it. A recent article in *The New York Times* observes that a recent United States Supreme Court decision has affirmed that the Religious Freedom Restoration Act does apply to businesses (Schwartz, 2014). This decision, and similar others, may encourage some businesses to try and harness the benefits of spirituality in the workplace.

This study provides a justification for business organizations to investigate how to provide spiritual-friendly environments for employees in order to promote the likelihood that external stimuli, from the organizational setting, may trigger inspired actions in their employees. Examples could include providing secluded spaces for prayer, meditation, or reflection in the workplace, allowing religious materials or symbols to be openly displayed in personal work spaces, discussing matters of religion with employees in a non-judgmental manner, providing clergy for appropriate situations when requested, and promoting organizational values which harmonize with many faith traditions. Undesirable examples would be formal efforts of proselytizing in the workplace or forcing participation in spiritual activities sponsored by the organization.

#### LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was a cross-sectional study of salespeople in only one industry, so it may not

be generalizable to salespeople in other industries. Since all measures were self-reported, the possibility of common method bias exists (Podsakoff et al., 2003) although we attempted to minimize the potential effects of common method bias as described in the Methods section. It would be highly desirable for longitudinal studies to be conducted of salespeople in other industries with a variety of performance measures obtained, including objective reports or managerial assessments. Although the sales force surveyed had twice the typical percentage of women found in automobile sales jobs, females were not heavily represented in this study. This further constrains the generalizability of the results, especially since women are found to be more religiously oriented than men (Koenig, George, & Sieglar, 1998; Strawbridge, Shema, Cohen, & Kaplan, 2001). A study with greater balance between the number of men and women in the sample would be desirable to see if this difference leads to substantively different findings.

Another limitation concerns the relatively large percentage of respondents (24.9 %) with relatively short tenure in the organization. Since organizational commitment tends to strengthen over time, the full effect of organizational commitment on criterion variables may have been attenuated due to the inclusion of a relatively large percentage of the sales force that has not internalized organizational values through the socialization process. Thus, it would be desirable to conduct a study of these variables using a sales force with, on average, a longer tenure with their employer.

The sales representatives used as respondents in this study were employed by an organization that did not promote or suppress spirituality within the organization. It could be revealing to investigate the variables in this study using respondents drawn from organizations that either actively support or suppress spirituality within the organization to see if the effect is replicated.

Finally, only two potential influences of inspiration were tested in this research. Identifying and testing additional conceptually related variables could add to our understanding of how inspiration can be fostered in the

workforce to benefit customers and organizations.

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**APPENDIX 1:  
Measures Used in the Study with the Item's Standardized Loadings**

<b>Spirituality</b>	<b>Factor loading</b>
I look to faith as a source of inspiration.	.92
I look to my faith as providing meaning and purpose in my life.	.94
My faith is an important part of who I am as a person.	.92
I look to my faith as a source of comfort.	.82
<b>Organizational commitment</b>	
I speak highly of this organization to my friends as a great organization to work for	.81
I find that my values and the organization's values are very similar	.71
I am proud to tell others that I am part of this organization	.75
I am extremely glad that I chose this organization to work for over others I was considering at the time I joined	.79
For me this is the best of all possible organizations for which to work	.70
There's not too much to be gained by sticking with this organization indefinitely.*	.66
Often I find it difficult to agree with this organization's policies on important matters relating to its employees.*	.74
<b>Inspiration</b>	
I experience inspiration (Frequency)	.77
I experience inspiration (Strength)	.89
Something I encounter or experience inspires me (Strength)	.85
I am inspired to do something (Strength)	.83
I feel inspired (Strength)	.88
<b>Self Performance</b>	<b>Item-total Correlation</b>
Willing to work hard	.417
Honesty with others	.550
Current selling skills	.742
Customer service skills	.717
Current overall job performance	.672
Ethics with others	.522
Product knowledge	.472
Ability to sell to present customers	.743
Works well with others in dealership	.488
Cross-selling effectiveness	.704
Responds well to coaching	.594

\* Reverse coded item