The challenge of spiritual and religious organisation

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The project

Aims

- To explore the challenges experienced by spiritual and religious organisations

- Understand what resources (internal and external) they have for addressing these challenges

- Examine outcomes from addressing - and not addressing – challenges, for organisations and their members
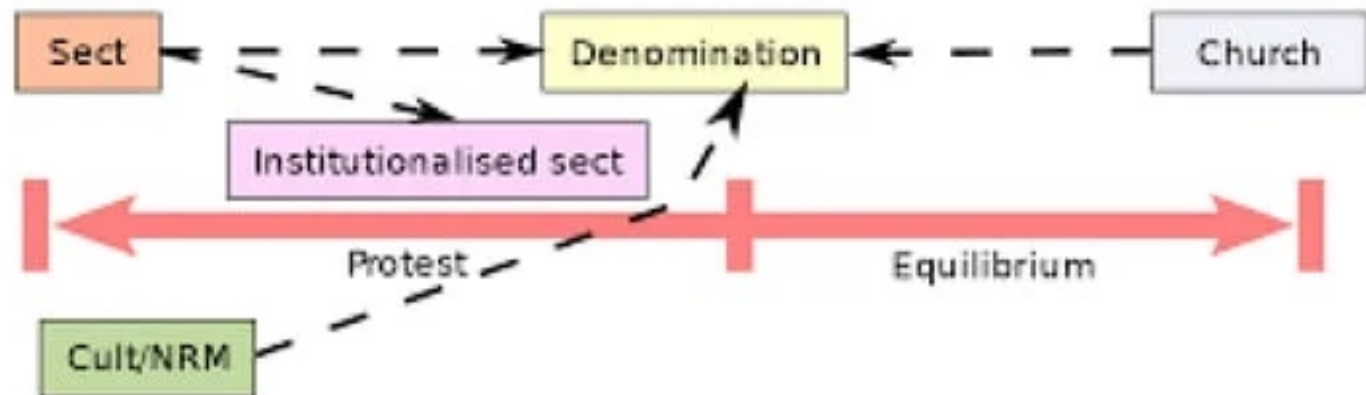
What kind of organisation?

- Organisations with a primary task of creating, supporting and promoting spiritual or religious insights, teaching and/or practices

- May also encompass other 'mission based' organisations if the same insights apply

The Church-sect continuum

The term 'spirituality'?

- 'Spirituality' is not so much a unitary concept as a signpost for a range of touchstones: our search for meaning, our sense of the sacred, the value of compassion, the experience of transcendence, the hunger for transformation'

- The value of the term spiritual is that it gives permission to speak of things that are unknowable'

- *From RSA report 'Spiritualise: revitalising spirituality to address 21st century challenges':*

How?

- Literature review
- Interviews
- Group discussions
- Case studies
- Workshops
- Collaborating and sharing :papers and articles, books, blogs, videos.........

Why (1)?

- Growing interest in spiritual dimension in mainstream organisations

- Fewer resources (books) adapting mainstream organisational insights for spiritual and religious organisations

- Mainstream organisational theory /practice often viewed as 'inappropriate' or missing the point

- Opportunity to provide new resources: seminars, written material, links, consultancy

Why (2): the paradox

- Bringing spiritual insights and practices to mainstream organisations seen as strengthening ethical principles, staff wellbeing, social responsibility and sustainability (enriching work experience)

But

- Spiritual and religious organisations can suffer organisational and ethical failures that leave followers damaged, disillusioned, disengaged, and/or impoverished
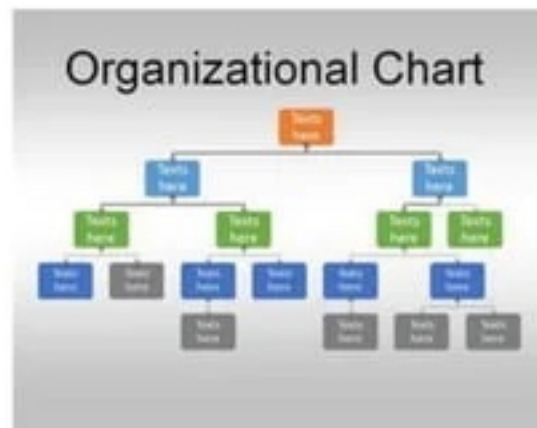
Organisational challenges

Internal

- Leadership and vision
- Structure, organisation and management
- Internal coherence and continuity
- Obtaining and maintaining buildings and facilities
- Financial probity/sustainability

External relations

- Legal and ethical frameworks
- Promotion/recruitment/marketing
- Relationship with other organisations:
  networks and neighbours

Spiritual organisation challenges

500 + profiles on World Religions and Spirituality website

https://wrldrels.org/

- Leadership and succession

- Splinter groups

- Ethical lapses

- Continuity v change - adaptation of original message/vision

- Fluctuations in size - rapid expansion and contraction

- Becoming 'mainstream' and overly bureaucratic

- External attacks: from 'anti cult' movements, medical, scientific, legal and political communities and other religious and spiritual groups

- Accusations of fraud, unethical behaviour,

Causes of ethical failure

- Individual or organisational failure?
- Failings more evident and shocking because of contradiction with teaching?
- Lack of ethical policies and processes?

Particular risks:
- Tension between spiritual and material
- Lack of interest in organisation/structure
- Charismatic leadership
- Spiritual bypassing
- Ignoring the shadow side

Tension
between spiritual and practical

- The highly spiritual have difficulty with the practical
- The highly practical have difficulty with spiritual

'Some spiritual institutions have attempted to create formal charters of ethnics to minimize spiritual abuses, but such movement can also have a stifling effect on teachers whose job it is to support the practitioners to personally access the wild, unbounded mystery of creation, and can sometimes create safety at the expense of creativity and freedom among practitioners'

Marianne Caplan (2009)
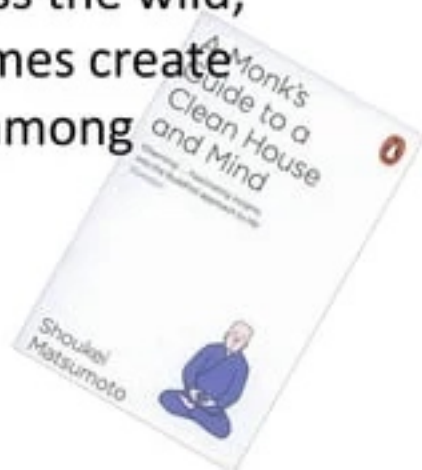
Lack of interest in organisation

'We do things differently'.....challenging mainstream 'norms'

'We're not an organisation, we are a........'
- Family
- Community
- Movement

'We don't need......
- Leaders
- Structures
- Ethical policies and procedures
- Training

Trust in Allah, but tie up your camel

The Prophet Muhammad (SAW)

'God/Spirit/Universe/Being will take care of it ....'

Charismatic leadership

Weber's three types of authority – legal, traditional and charismatic

Charismatic leadership a strong feature of New Religious Movements (but also present in main stream churches, denominations, sects)

Advantages :
- Emotional appeal
- Positive impact/capacity for change
- Creates shared identity

Risks
- Leaders become addicted to charisma
- Organisation becomes addicted to charisma
- 'Power 'corrupts' (or is misused)
- Small central group/strong hierarchy (guru centric)
- Lack of challenge
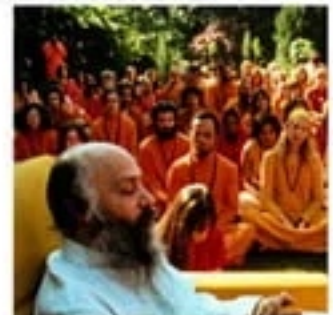
Spiritual bypassing :

"Tendency to use spiritual ideas and practices to sidestep or avoid facing unresolved emotional issues, psychological wounds, and unfinished developmental tasks".   John Welwood

Ignoring the shadow side:

Focusing on the positive and uplifting while ignoring hidden, repressed, shameful or guilt laden aspects of human nature

Spiritual bypassing is the practice of denying and suppressing the darkness within you and plastering it with a sparkly feel-good bandaid.

lonerwolf

STD's
(Spiritually transmitted diseases)

- Fast food spirituality: offering instant enlightenment
- Faux spirituality: donning spiritual clothes
- Confused motivations: wanting to belong, be loved
- Identifying with spiritual experiences: lack of integration of spiritual insights
- Spiritualised ego: 'its all about me'
- Mass production of spiritual teachers: immature teachers
- Spiritual pride: Feeling spiritually superior
- Group mind: co dependence and lack of challenge
- The chosen people complex: we are the greatest!

- Marianne Caplan (2009)

Mariana Caplan, PhD
Eyes Wide Open
Cultivating Discernment on the Spiritual Path
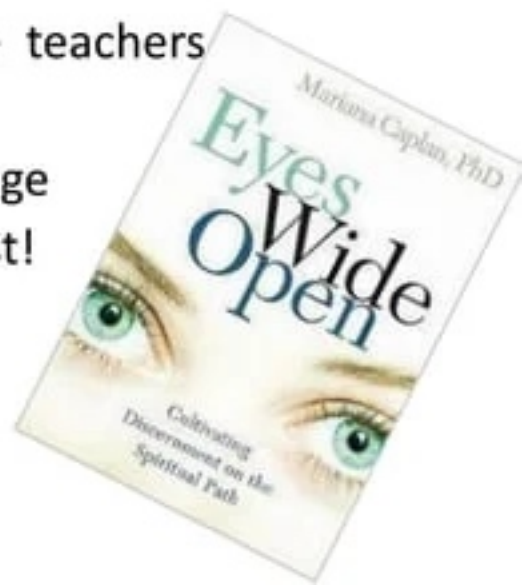
Three hopeful hypotheses

- Organisation challenges relatively predictable (so not necessarily cause for shame and guilt, or be covered up)

- Resources are available (but perhaps need to look in new directions for these)

- Challenges can be a crucible for spiritual growth

New resources
for new (and old) spiritual organisations

- Different ways of structuring an organisation : e.g. Holacracy, Agile working

- Different leadership styles : e.g. servant leadership, feminist leadership styles

- New ways of addressing organisational challenges: e.g. liberating structures, theory U

- Learning from other religions/spiritual groups: e,g incorporating mindfulness and other

  spiritual teachings

THE *Mindful*
LEADER

TEN PRINCIPLES
for Bringing Out the Best in Ourselves and Others

MICHAEL CARROLL
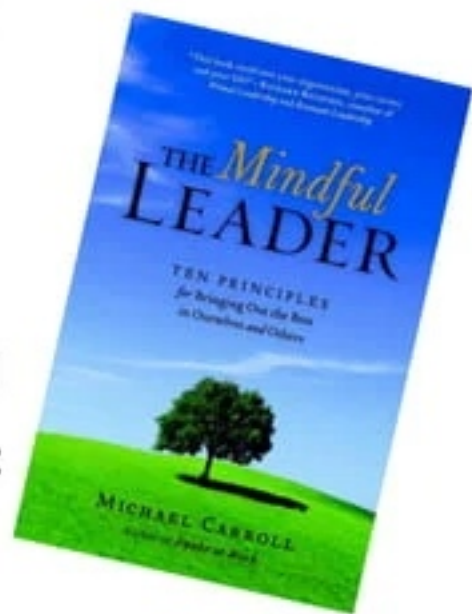
Hierarchy   Holarchy

Examples of new resources

Accessible resources

- 'Management' resources are often only available in journals, formats, styles or language not very accessible to those working in spiritual organisations.
- There is a need to translate useful information into accessible language and formats and make them available in more suitable locations

Example

- In this very accessible book, author Barry Taylor draws on his years of experience of advising organisations both in London (the City) and Glastonbury, to explores subtle differences to be found in the successful running of spiritually inspired projects and the problems experienced.
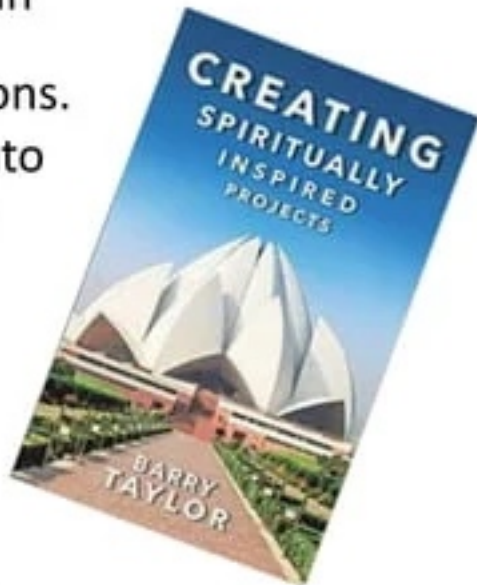
QUESTIONS?

COMMENTS?

THANK YOU!

Resources

- World Spirituality and Religions https://wrldrels.org/
- Journal of Management, Spirituality and Religion https://www.tandfonline.com
- RSA: Spiritualise project: https://www.thersa.org/globalassets/pdfs/reports/spiritualise-report.pdf
- Marianne Caplan (2009): *Eyes wide open*: Sounds True, Boulder, Colorado. https://www.soundstrue.com
- Michael Carroll: http://awakeatwork.net/
- Holacracy: https://www.holacracy.org
- Liberating structures: http://www.liberatingstructures.com
- Taylor B (2005) Creating spiritually inspired projects. https://www.amazon.co.uk/Creating-Spiritually-Inspired-Projects-Taylor/dp/1785072080