

An Abstract of the Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies Thesis of:

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In Support of Soul in an Organization: The Use of Storytelling

Research is showing a growing trend among workers of a sense of dissatisfaction with the work experience, a general sense of loss of meaning and vitality. A response to this dissatisfaction lies in something fundamental that differs from the organization's visions and values, a phenomenon that is referred to in the literature as soul in the organization. What is soul in an organization? And in relation to this question, how can soul be accessed and nurtured in the organizational setting? One response invokes the age-old practice of storytelling. Storytelling has been a way of sharing history and culture in communities, and it is used for this purpose in organizations. How can storytelling be applied in the work environment to go beyond the sharing of knowledge to accessing and supporting the presence of soul?

A review of the literature reveals descriptions and understandings of soul from the spiritual and philosophical perspective as well as from the organizational perspective. While a definition of soul is elusive, a consistent theme is the idea of soul as an intangible essence, which manifests as hidden, deep, and mysterious. The fundamental concept is that soul is the something other that imparts richness and fullness to the experience of and the meaning of life. Soul is a vital element of human existence and a vital element in a thriving workplace. The literature suggests that storytelling can reach into the hidden depths of the self where soul resides. Participation in storytelling can access components of soul and enable the expression of soul.

Storytelling about work experiences can be readily integrated into the flow of the workplace. Through the assistance of a facilitator, questions can be asked that aid in the process of eliciting aspects of soul for both the teller of the story and the listeners.

The synergistic relationship between soul and storytelling provides opportunities in an organization to support the sense of meaning and purpose that soul embodies.