
ANNOTATION

Behan III, Anthony C. “Lasallian Workplace Spirituality: Toward an Understanding of Meaningfulness, Belonging, and Person-Organization Fit of the Lasallian Workplace.” EdD dissertation, Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota, 2018. 163 pp.

In the first sentence of his dedication, Anthony Behan uses the word “journey” and that is exactly the invitation offered to each reader. The author presents a series of paradigm shifts (3-4) during the last century that have given shape to our contemporary workplace, and he clearly maps out the corresponding research questions that arise from these changes in society (6). The purpose of this dissertation “is ‘to contribute to fundamental knowledge and theory’ of workplace spirituality as it relates to Lasallian pedagogy and spirituality” (7). The first chapter maps out the direction of the journey for the Lasallian educator with a clear set of definitions (9-12) to guide the person through various stages.

Plunged into the interaction of “meaningfulness, belonging and person-organization fit” (13), Behan offers a solid overview of “spirituality” (13-16) while the review of literature gives an overview of “workplace spirituality” (16-17) in terms of the individual, the group, and the organization (18-21). This chapter in and of itself is an excellent springboard for discussions among all three levels on how they define mission. Any stakeholder interested in “preserving, retaining and continuing” (21) mission will do well to consider the author’s keen understanding of the three above-mentioned interactions. After defining meaningfulness “-of work, -in work and -at work” (25-26), Behan constructs a parallel argument for belonging (35-38) and an abridged reference to person-organization fit (38-40).

The “journey” continues for the reader as the previously described elements come together to present a creative interplay of spirituality and leadership in the workplace (40-41). “The Spiritual Leader” section is akin to an examination of conscience as one reflects on such qualities as diversity, authenticity, communication, and ritual to name a few. Among the numerous characteristics of spiritual leadership, three are key. First, “the ability to promote a sense of meaningfulness and belongingness for individuals in the organization” (41). Second, “Effective communication plays a significant part in promoting workplace spirituality” (43). Lastly, but not limited to, “...the spiritual leader is responsible for creating a people-centered culture that values trust, integrity, and compassion” (45). However, the “journey” is not all wine and roses. The author skillfully tackles ethical considerations such as isolation, manipulation, abuse of power and, finally, the shadow side of spirituality in the workplace (48-54). It is precisely here that the “journey” takes an upward slope in the road: the Lasallian tradition. For both the neophyte and the experienced educator, Behan presents a clear and concise overview of the Lasallian tradition

with touchstones that can only inspire the reader (54-63). After offering responses to “What is Lasallian?” (56), Behan concludes this chapter with a succinct summary of Lasallian spirituality and identity (56-61).

The “journey” now gets enfolded in the lived experience of the Lasallian workplace. Behan presents an understanding of his inquiry through the phenomenology of intentionality and intuition – which lead to creativity and openness (65-66). Rooted largely in the work of Clark Moustakas (66-75), this project is clearly situated within the framework of the Buttimer Institute of Lasallian Studies, a Lasallian formation opportunity. Each step of the project is described and can serve as an excellent guide for anyone who is considering such an academic undertaking (75-84). After Behan shares his initial thoughts on the start of the project (87), the reader is invited to see how the “journey” begins to take shape from numerous personal observations under the tripartite framework of meaningfulness, belonging, and person-organization fit with a series of substructures (88-117). The initial impression of these comments might appear to be somewhat random, but there is a strong interweaving of the tripartite framework that unites together for the purpose of the project. Although the study focuses on K-12 education, there are numerous implications for higher education.

Now the “journey” digs deeper for the reader. The previously mentioned tripartite framework takes shape with the undertow of Lasallian spirituality as it is nothing less than transformative. Behan shows us that the “meaningfulness of work in the Lasallian setting is a rich dimension and an essential element of finding purpose in work” (119) and develops that insight with a number of contemporary writers (119-121). Secondly, for Behan “belonging” is reflected in Saint John Baptist de La Salle’s belief that “union in a community is a precious gem” (122). Practical examples follow for the consideration of the reader (122-125). Concluding his research, the author “suggests there exists a natural fit between educators and Lasallian culture, which leads to happiness, gratitude and general workplace satisfaction” (125). Numerous examples follow from “contemporary literature on organizational leadership and change” (126-128).

It is not the purpose of this annotation to summarize each leg of the tripartite framework for in doing so it would be an injustice to the richness of the project. However, it is well worth highlighting a number of key findings. First, there is “a need for local formation programs” (134). “Second, it is recommended that individual ministries design and implement an inclusive and comprehensive new teacher program that specifically targets belonging and association” (134) with a shout out to the work of Brother Frederick Mueller (DNA). “Third, the Lasallian Institute may want to investigate the way in which Lasallian educators perceive the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lasallian charism” (135).

Let it be said that meaningfulness, belonging, and person-organization fit are alive and well, rooted in a 300-year-old Lasallian tradition and hopefully ready to move into the future. What are you willing to contribute to the “journey”?