

The translation of self-spirituality into organizations

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Abstract

This study provides an analysis of rich field-based data regarding the *translation* of self-spirituality into Israeli public schools. The study also draws from research conducted in other Western for-profit and health organizations. While the analysis supports existing assertions from research regarding the increasing market orientation of the culture of self-spirituality, it also identifies the specific methods used by brokers to translate self-spirituality concepts into the school system and distinguishes between ethical and unethical approaches to translation. It further illuminates the interactional dynamics that explain the emergence of an instrumental orientation to the translation of self-spirituality.

Keywords

instrumentalism, organizations, spirituality, translation, yoga

Résumé

Cette étude fournit une riche analyse de données de terrain sur la *traduction* de *self-spirituality* (« spiritualité de soi ») dans les écoles publiques israéliennes. L'étude s'inspire également de recherches menées dans d'autres organisations occidentales à vocation lucrative et dans le domaine de la santé. Alors que l'analyse rejoint les thèses actuelles de la recherche concernant l'orientation croissante de la culture de la *self-spirituality* vers le marché, elle identifie également les méthodes spécifiques utilisées par les médiateurs pour traduire les concepts de *self-spirituality* dans le système scolaire, et distingue les

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approches éthiques et non éthiques de cette traduction. Elle met également en lumière les interactions dynamiques qui expliquent l'émergence d'une orientation instrumentale de la traduction de la *self-spirituality*.

Mots-clés

instrumentalisme, organisations, spiritualité, traduction, yoga

Introduction

This article proposes a reflection on the critique of the concept of self-spirituality, informed by an extended case study of the translation of self-spirituality into public schools and other Western mainstream organizations in Israel.

According to Charles Taylor, and other scholars, a cultural revolution has swept across the Western world over recent decades, which has 'profoundly altered the conditions of belief in our societies', shaping the contours of society as a whole (Taylor, 2007: 473). The focal point of this cultural revolution is the individual and personal experience; key aspirations are unity, integrity, and holism. The language of this new culture is replete with assertions and sensations of harmony, balance, flow, integrations, and 'being at one' (Taylor, 2007: 506–513).

As a dynamic cultural phenomenon, self-spirituality has gradually evolved from its counter-cultural origins into a more mainstream presence in Western societies (Hanegraaff, 1998; Heelas, 2008). But this growing interest in self-spirituality has been accompanied by criticism and concerns regarding its underlying ethics, albeit a critical perspective somewhat mediated by more positive evaluations (e.g. Bell and Taylor, 2004; Heelas, 2008; Lips-Wiersma et al., 2009; McGhee and Grant, 2017; Rindfleish, 2005; York, 2001). In the main, the debate about self-spirituality culture is focused on two critiques. First, self-spirituality is often equated, negatively, with market orientation, several researchers describing the phenomenon as a 'spiritual supermarket' (Redden, 2016, quoting others; York, 2001). Other studies have described the appropriation and commoditization of various cultural traditions by self-spirituality (Rindfleish, 2005). However, not all scholars of self-spirituality subscribe fully to these arguments. For instance, Heelas (2008) argues that spirituality represents a meaningful alternative to consumer capitalism. By expanding the horizons of participants beyond narrowly individualistic and consumerist parameters, the spiritual producer introduces a post-materialistic, humanistic ethicality (Bell, 2009). Redden (2016) (like Heelas, 2008), proposes that any evaluation of self-spirituality should consider the subjective perspectives of its adherents. He argues that 'New Agers' acknowledge the existence of many possible spiritual routes, and believe in their own right to try these out.

A second critique of self-spirituality culture pertains to the very nature of the quest to discover the spiritual self. Several scholars argue that the freedom of individuals to express their inner nature through 'spirituality' has been subordinated to the demands of corporate business culture, and the needs of a competitive economy (Altglas, 2014; Watts, 2018).

The critique of workplace spirituality focuses mainly on the ways in which spirituality can be misused, particularly for managerial control (e.g. Bell and Taylor, 2003; Long and Mills, 2010) and for instrumental gain – that is, when spirituality is applied as an organizational resource, commonly for commercial gain in some form (Driscoll et al., 2019; Driscoll and Wiebe, 2007; Gotsis and Kortezi, 2008; Lips-Wiersma et al., 2009 quoting others). Alongside this critique, however, there are many advocates of workplace spirituality, including many who argue that spirituality can exert a positive influence on the broader ethical orientation of organizations (Gotsis and Kortezi, 2008; McGhee and Grant, 2017).

While a number of studies have focused on self-spirituality discourse (Bell and Taylor, 2003; Gotsis, and Kortezi, 2008; Long and Mills, 2010), there is relatively little empirical research exploring the ways in which self-spirituality ideas and practices are actually *translated* into mainstream organizations (exceptions include Islam et al., 2017; Zaidman et al., 2009). We argue that a critique of self-spirituality that focuses *only* on its discourse is not sufficient. What is required is an analysis of the ways in which self-spirituality is translated and enacted *in practice*; an analysis explicitly directed toward examining this enactment in key societal institutions, such as the mainstream work environment, education, and health organizations.

Based on an extended case study focusing on the translation of ideas and practices associated with the culture of self-spirituality into state (public) schools, and drawing from similar research conducted in other mainstream organizations, this article presents an empirical account of the process of the translation of self-spirituality ideas and practices.

Our objectives in this article are as follows: first, to identify the ways in which self-spirituality ideas and practices are translated into public schools and other mainstream organizations; and second, to discuss these observations in light of the existing critique regarding workplace ethics and self-spirituality culture, mainly the claim that self-spirituality serves as a conduit for consumerism and instrumentalism. We selected the Israeli state (public) schools arena for our study of the incorporation of self-spirituality into mainstream institutions, precisely because schools are a primary site of socialization. Our analysis of the process of translation will focus on the labor of actors whom we term *self-spirituality brokers*. Self-spirituality brokers are individuals immersed in the practice, ideology, and language of self-spirituality, and who introduce self-spirituality practices into mainstream organizations like public schools. Another group of significant actors are the representatives of the organization in question – in the case of public schools, principals, teachers, and parents. Our research is informed by – among other factors – the literature on translation in management research. Within this domain, *translation* refers to the transformation and transportation of management concepts when applied to a different organizational context (O'Mahoney, 2016).

What is self-spirituality?

Self-spirituality is a multifaceted cultural phenomenon, incorporating ideas, concepts, and practices from a range of domains including esotericism, psychology, Eastern philosophy, complementary and alternative medicine, religion, feminism, the human

potential movement, the ecology movement, and neo-paganism (Hanegraaff, 1998). In spite of its diversity of perspectives, scholars have identified several common core and interrelated dimensions of self-spirituality (Zaidman et al., 2017; Zemp and Liebe, 2019). The first is the *transcendence of the self*, that is, a belief that one is connected to other people, ideas, nature, or some kind of ‘higher power’ (Ashforth and Pratt, 2003). Closely linked to this is an emphasis on authentic selfhood and inner wisdom, and on connecting with these inner depths, including a focus on ‘self-actualization’ – that is, empowering one’s ‘authentic self’ (Flere and Kirbis, 2009; Sointu and Woodhead, 2008). Second, people who embrace self-spirituality tend to be committed to a vision of authentic *selfhood-in-relation*. Such relationality is conceived as fundamentally small-scale and egalitarian in outlook (Sointu and Woodhead, 2008). The third overarching dimension is *holism and harmony*, that is, the integration of different aspects of one’s self into a coherent and symbiotic conception of the self (Ashforth and Pratt, 2003; Flere and Kirbis, 2009). This dimension includes a focus on the body, which is understood as being the access point to unique selfhood, serving as a means of achieving greater well-being (Sointu and Woodhead, 2008). The fourth dimension is a belief in personal *growth*: a clear sense of what one seeks to become and what one needs to do in order to achieve self-actualization (Ashforth and Pratt, 2003).

The translation of self-spirituality into mainstream Western organizations

Brokers utilize several methods in translating spirituality ideas and practices into mainstream organizations. First, research shows that they ‘drop’ or change elements perceived as overly religious or mystical from their consultancy services (Kabat-Zinn, 2011; Zaidman et al., 2009). The introduction of the Buddhist term ‘mindfulness’, as in ‘mindfulness-based stress reduction’ (MBSR) by Kabat-Zinn (2011: 289) is one example. The author describes how, at an early stage of his consultancy practice, he resolved to introduce MBSR in ways which avoided the ‘risk of it being seen as Buddhist, New Age, Eastern Mysticism, or just plain flakey’ as much as possible. This process of translation has been described by Fadlon (2005: 2) as *domestication*; a process ‘in which the foreign is rendered familiar and palatable to local tastes’. Similarly, Altglas (2014) demonstrates how neo-Hindu movements and the Jewish Kabbalah Center *domesticated* their teachings by presenting them as universal and meta-religious.

In order to *domesticate* spirituality, spiritual consultants use several techniques of ‘camouflage’ to mask the religious or mystical elements of their practice (Zaidman et al., 2009). First, they are introduced into organizations as conventional consultants. With time, once organization members have accepted their positioning, they then begin to introduce more overtly spiritual practices and concepts (Islam and Holm, 2016; Zaidman et al., 2009). Another form of camouflage involves brokers replacing the vocabulary of self-spirituality with a language more familiar to their clientele, such as references to rationality and data-justified rhetoric (Karjalainen et al., 2018; Zaidman et al., 2009).

Second, brokers also make attempts to align self-spirituality with existing organizational values and perspectives. For example, several studies show how practitioners have presented spirituality as a technique that can be harnessed for

profit-oriented ends, or as a tool for increasing competitiveness, effectiveness, productivity, and profit (Islam et al., 2017; Islam and Holm, 2016; Karjalainen et al., 2018; Zaidman et al., 2009).

Translation research

Over the last 15 years or so, the theory of *translation* has become increasingly influential in the fields of management and organization studies (O'Mahoney, 2016). Translation is described in the literature as a process that frames elements of a community's worldview in terms of another community (Pawlowski and Robey, 2004). Several studies discuss translation in terms of ideas that must be translated in order to pass through the cultural/identity membranes of the organization and be adopted successfully. These studies demonstrate that the interests, frames of references, core values, and identity of an organization's members (Doorewaard and Bijsterveld, 2001; Fussel and George, 2000; Sevon, 1996) all have an impact on the translation process. Sevon (1996) uses the principle of 'a logic of appropriateness' to describe how translators choose those ideas that are perceived as socially appropriate and in accordance with organizational identity.

Several translation studies focus on the process of 'boundary crossings' (O'Mahoney, 2016; Sevon, 1996). In the present case, the general notion of 'boundary crossings' relates to the ways that self-spirituality practices 'cross' organizational boundaries. This perspective affords insight into the processes which allow for meanings to be translated between groups.

Research context

The Israeli educational system

The Israeli educational system was founded on ideological principles associated with the survival and reinvigoration of the Jewish people. Its explicit objectives included the transmission of Jewish civilization, and fostering communal and group solidarity (Elazar, 1997). Accordingly, by the 1980s the discourse of this system emphasized the rhetoric of cohesion (Katriel and Nesher, 1986). However, critical scholars have argued that from the 1990s onwards, the system has made a major shift, away from ideological and toward instrumental goals. According to this new discourse, individuals are envisioned as autonomous entities – fully responsible for their choices in the era of the global economy (Yonah et al., 2008).

Self-spirituality in Israeli public schools

Since the 1990s, in parallel with a growing interest in self-spirituality practices in Israeli mainstream organizations (such as medical institutions), and concomitant participation in related leisure activities (e.g. festivals), the discourse and practice of self-spirituality have found their way into the Israeli public school system (Fadlon, 2005; Zaidman et al., 2009). Programs incorporating self-spirituality practices such as yoga, meditation, shiatsu, and guided imagination are delivered at schools and kindergartens during regular

school hours by self-spirituality brokers or by instructors trained by these brokers. Some brokers operate independently. However, many operate through a significant intermediary in the field, the A Foundation (AF) (pseudonym).

The AF is a dominant actor in the education field in Israel, working to enrich the school curriculum through programs intended to broaden the child's experiences in the school system. The foundation works in collaboration with Israel's Ministry of Education (who must approve all its proposed programs), with metropolitan and municipal authorities, and with parents. Principals, teachers, and parents can choose from a variety of programs; they can also decide to terminate specific programs. School principals are the main 'gatekeepers' facilitating (or blocking) the adoption of a program in a school.

Study design

We collected data at two time points: between 2003 and 2005; and 9 years later, between 2011 and 2012. In both phases, we collected data at elementary and high schools, and a few kindergartens, across the country.

First phase of data collection

In-depth semi-structured interviews. These were conducted individually with 44 people, including self-spirituality brokers, school principals, kindergarten and upper school teachers, and coordinators of the AF (see Appendix A).

Group interviews. These were conducted with the coordinators of the AF program. The aim of these interviews was to obtain information and knowledge about introducing self-spirituality programs into public schools.

Observations. We observed 18 self-spirituality program sessions, conducted with children in two kindergartens, three elementary schools, and three high schools. We also observed a workshop for yoga teachers, focusing on how to deliver yoga in schools; a mandala workshop for yoga teachers; a yoga workshop for kindergarten teachers; and a marketing session, guided by a yoga teacher and directed at school representatives and parents.

Documents. We analyzed a variety of documents, including marketing materials of individual spiritual entrepreneurs; materials published by the AF; documents produced by yoga, tai chi, and shiatsu teachers (including four complete programs, as well as lesson plans and exercises); and several sets of correspondence regarding the implementation of self-spirituality practices into the schools.

Websites. We reviewed the content of various websites (e.g. the AF website, and the websites of 14 self-spirituality brokers) in order to extract contextual data (see appendix B).

Second phase of data collection

Interviews. We conducted in-depth interviews with 23 people. The interviewees included six school representatives from four schools, including the four school principals. The

interview participants also included seven self-spirituality brokers, responsible for introducing a variety of programs to schools, and three yoga teachers. Five of the interviewees were interviewed twice – at both the first and second stages of data collection. We conducted a joint discussion with the three senior managers of the AF, and we conducted four interviews with the AF representatives responsible for different regions of the country.

Websites. We surveyed the websites of brokers who had participated in the first stage of data collection, aiming to see if the programs that they had introduced into schools continued across the two phases of our research.

Data analysis. Data analysis occurred in several stages. First, we analyzed each category of data independently (e.g. interviews with school principals; interviews with self-spirituality brokers; observations; and documents). We then analyzed the *content* of each text in a specific category, and the *form* of each text. Second, we compared the results within each data category, in order to trace the method of translation of self-spirituality practices into the schools over time. Third, we compared the dominant themes which emerged from the analysis of the first phase of data collection with those from the second phase. Finally, we compared our data with results reported in other studies regarding the translation of self-spirituality into for-profit organizations and medical institutions.

Findings

Following a close review of the data, we identified two modes of action employed by self-spirituality brokers when introducing and translating self-spirituality into public schools. First, they create boundary objects; second, they embrace a plasticity and pragmatism in their translation processes. By ‘pragmatism’, we mean a practical approach to problems, rather than feeling bound to ideological or abstract considerations.

Creating boundary objects

Proposals for extracurricular activity in public schools must pass required threshold requirements, set and maintained by gatekeepers. The gatekeeper, initially, is usually the AF person, followed by the school principal. Our data show that one of the mechanisms used by self-spirituality brokers to tackle this potential organizational obstacle was in fact, the embodiment of self-spirituality ideas and practices into a more or less formal structured product – that is, they gave it a name, defined its general rationale, and created a sequence of lesson plans, each with its own title, rationale, goals, and devices (e.g. exercises or games). As boundary objects, these programs contained self-spirituality ideas (language, images, practices) configured to align with the school’s program (e.g. structure, rationale).

The way in which a program focusing on yoga, guided imagination, and meditation was presented to a school serves as an example of such a new boundary object. In this case, when the core program was applied in schools, the content of its lesson plans were adapted to meet the needs of a particular population (e.g. a religious population or pupils

in special education). In this kind of translation, the ‘common identity’ (Star and Griesemer, 1989) of yoga includes a number of postures, accepted as contributing to the children’s physical body and well-being and consequently legitimized by the participants. Besides these ‘common identity’ elements of the program, many yoga programs contain additional elements including social games and music, and specific knowledge content such as learning English letters or Jewish stories. The positioning of yoga as a boundary object involved the creation of diverse elements suitable for the children’s age and educational background.

Pragmatism in the actual enactment of self-spirituality

Compliance with the school’s norms

Once a program had been designed, approved, and accepted (by the AF and/or school), brokers then had to incorporate it into the existing school setting.

Our data, from both 2003 and 2012, show that school norms were adopted by self-spirituality brokers as a means of implementing specific programs. Brokers working as classroom instructors often embraced conduct patterns similar to those of conventional teachers in public schools. They took attendance, for instance, and occasionally used class artifacts like their teacher counterparts. They used the class board as a pedagogical tool, and dictated text to pupils, who in turn took notes in their notebooks. In response to school requirements, instructors – especially in the higher grades – also assigned homework and graded pupil assignments. Occasionally, mainly in high schools, instructors even prepared exams.

This compliance with school norms included accepting the institutional disciplinary culture. In our observations, we noticed that instructors occasionally raised their voices or sent children out of the classroom as punishment. They also imposed compulsory pupil participation in the specific self-spirituality class activity. This situation was observed in one class, during which a yoga instructor turned to a student and said: ‘Rani, you will have to leave class. Why didn’t you do the back exercise?’ In this case, the yoga instructor was scolding and punishing the pupil for not performing as instructed.

Several instructors expressed their dissatisfaction with specific institutional practices, such as the need to give grades; nevertheless, none referred to overt negotiation of such issues with the school management. Instructors, generally, complied with their schools’ rules.

Overall, our data show that certain commonplace Israeli public school norms were maintained, in terms of the meaning associated with the learning process, the objects associated with such learning, and the role of the participants in the process of learning. As an example: the pupils learning shiatsu were expected – in fact, obliged – to do homework as they would with mathematics or any other subjects, and the instructors were expected to check, evaluate, and grade the pupils’ work, just like any other teacher.

Our data show that the enactment of self-spirituality programs involved acceptance of the social hierarchy between the instructor and the pupils in each class, as well as adopting the meaning and norms involved with learning. Our data support previous research showing that translators choose the ways that are perceived as socially

appropriate and aligned with the organizational identity and frame of reference (Sevon, 1996). One should note, however, that specific adjustments by brokers indicate significant pragmatism. According to Lewis (2007), self-spirituality views education as an informal and continuing process guided by the individual 'Inner Teacher', while discounting the influence of formal education with its emphasis on 'classrooms' and so on. Furthermore, within self-spirituality, children are portrayed as representing those who can experience their inner being (Heelas, 2012); these representations of the 'ideal self' are evident in the websites of several brokers – children portrayed as creative and intuitive, occupied in learning processes that involves pleasure. However, this ideal is often abandoned when self-spirituality brokers enter the actual classroom and are obliged to impose various forms of discipline.

Compliance with schools' values

Helping to improve the 'school atmosphere', mainly by preventing violence, appeared to be the key role that the school principals and teachers who we interviewed attributed to the incorporation of self-spirituality practices into the school. The accounts gathered during the first phase of the research (2012) were similar in content, structure, and language. They usually opened with arguments underlining the need to improve the atmosphere in the school, or with a more direct argument forthrightly acknowledging the challenge of school violence. The typical account started with a critique of contemporary parenting practices. Some school principals were very direct and clear in relating the 'school atmosphere' to the spiritual practices that they had incorporated into the school curriculum. As one stated bluntly, '[the instructor] gets into the school in order to improve the school climate. I regard her program as a way of self-control and relaxation'.

The language that most schoolteachers and principals used regarding spiritual practices – 'control from inside', 'no distraction in class', 'enhancing calmness', and 'reducing violence' – indicate that spiritual practices were usually perceived as a means to an end. The functional logic with regard to spiritual practices also entailed the use of functional metaphors. 'Tools' was a recurring metaphor. For example, a school principal said: 'I found that the tools that T. provided were very effective in handling noise in class'. This widespread metaphor – used as much by brokers as by schoolteachers and principals – reflects the genuine nature of functional spirituality, as constructed by all the actors.

Furthermore, brokers created programs with titles directly relating to the rhetoric of violence or calmness, such as *Movement toward serenity* and *Shalom Alimut* (literal translation 'Goodbye Violence' – the word 'Shalom' means both 'Goodbye' and 'Peace' in Hebrew, and the name draws on both meanings). A few of the brokers applied a collectivist approach, adopting titles such as *Let us come together*. Others applied New Age titles to their programs, such as *The dolphin within me*.

Comparative analysis of data from the two phases shows that there was a change in how self-spirituality ideas and practices were interpreted. Some themes, including class cohesion and the prevention of violence, were echoed in the most recent data. Nevertheless, in the second phase there were more references to the individual child.

During the second phase of data collection, a group interview was conducted with four AF coordinators, who had worked with many schools throughout the country and had between 7 and 14 years' experience each in supervising alternative extracurricular programs. All four spoke about the growing awareness in the education system of the importance of creating a peaceful school environment. As one explained, 'There are many problems of discipline at schools . . . Many children take Ritalin, and still there is no peace in the classrooms'.

We see this new direction as part of a shift toward individualism, which was manifested in various ways. Accounts of yoga instructors from the second phase also underscored this new trend. One instructor, who had taught yoga to children for over 10 years, described yoga as 'something that provides confidence to the child'. She also provided the concrete example of *hero* posture, in which the chest is thrust forward, and how it 'strengthens the child's self-esteem'.

The recent data also indicated that several instructors worked closely with kindergarten and school teachers in resolving the problems of specific children.

The term 'tools' was as widely employed in the second phase of research as it was in the first. Self-spirituality practices were constructed as 'practical tools', for example, as 'tools for life and tools for school'. Practices such as relaxation techniques and guided imagination were construed by instructors as 'therapeutic tools', employed to 'assist children with emotional problems' and to help students overcome examination anxiety. However, while a yoga instructor spoke about the 'tools' of yoga, in response to a probing question, he replied,

Another goal of the program is to create a positive experience . . . it is in fact planting seeds . . . the bigger goal is to distribute yoga so that more people will practice it, and it would make a better world.

His account reflects a different interpretation of yoga, one associated with self-spirituality values such as interconnectedness.

Active domestication

Our data, from 2003 and 2012, show that many individuals (including school principals, school teachers, kindergarten teachers, parents, and community administrators) perceived self-spirituality practices as 'foreign', 'mystical', and even 'dangerous'. The rejection of self-spirituality practices emerged from the 'foreign' meaning attributed to it, essentially implying that the practices were perceived as alien to the core Jewish-Israeli culture. They were also often constructed as 'mystical', incorporating irrational, unpredictable, and unknown elements.

The fears of parents, teachers, and school principals were also echoed in the most recent data (2011). One kindergarten teacher who had promoted the introduction of several self-spirituality programs, and was in charge of its implementation into 14 kindergartens explained, 'At first, we included morning meditation, and we were afraid that these practices contained mystical elements . . .' She further explained that with time, kindergartens in her municipality introduced reiki, yoga, shiatsu, and guided

imagination. However, they stopped a specific guided imagination practice after noticing that the children's narratives of what they were imagining were identical. She explained, 'My concern was to avoid turning the children into robots who think alike, and turning the kindergarten into a mystical cult'.

The domestication of the 'foreign' and 'mystical' elements of self-spirituality practices took different forms. First, language and symbols associated with 'Eastern' culture were often abandoned and not introduced into the classroom setting. Our observations indicate that at all levels and in both secular and religious schools, words like 'meditation' and 'Om' (a sacred sound and spiritual icon in Indian religions) were almost always excluded from the vocabulary. Occasionally, they were replaced with familiar language: for example, 'peaceful time' was used in place of 'meditation', and 'shalom' (peace) in place of 'Om'.

Second, when brokers introduced self-spirituality paraphernalia (e.g. bells, incense, and candles) into the class setting, they did so with extreme caution. In a workshop for children's yoga instructors (2004), an instructor from the Israeli Yoga Teachers' Association was rather straightforward about this point: 'You can ask them to bring an object for concentration to class, but make sure that it won't be something mystical'.

Third, brokers avoided labeling self-spirituality practices in such terms. A yoga instructor working in a high school explained, 'By the end of the year, the children did the whole sequence of movements without calling it Ashtanga yoga'. Another broker observed that the teachers in the kindergarten did not understand that children in fact had been practicing Vipassana meditation for several months.

Discussion

Overall, the conclusion of our empirical investigation regarding patterns in translation choices at two points of time is that in the encounter with public schools, the data indicate that brokers translate self-spirituality practices and ideas consistently and in a particular way, and that this translation occurs in diverse contexts.

Based on the findings of the current study, and on the findings of research conducted in other mainstream organizations, we identify two specific means of translating self-spirituality by brokers. First, brokers frame their products as boundary objects. Existing research shows that self-spirituality brokers apply boundary objects (albeit not explicitly defined as such) in other public institutions. For instance, spiritual care providers – individuals who support terminally ill people – adjust their practices to reflect the patient's age, religion, and personality (Zaidman, 2017). Likewise, several organizational consultants also construct their consultancy services as boundary objects – using, for instance, theories, models, and practices from organizational psychology and meditation (Zaidman et al., 2009).

We argue that the creation of boundary objects assists in the adaptation of ideas or practices to local needs (Star and Griesemer, 1989). It also makes it possible for brokers to introduce their services to diverse audiences, while reducing the effort required to make entirely new products.

Second, brokers embrace adaptivity and pragmatism in their translation processes. They use self-spirituality practices to evoke diverse (at times contradictory) meanings.

Our data show that self-spirituality brokers create and recreate programs that can be matched to *different values*, such as individualistic *and/or* collectivistic values. In our case, the influence of the global neoliberal discourse, with its emphasis on functionality and instrumental goals (Yonah et al., 2008) appeared as dominant in the educational system, in both the first and second phases of data collection. According to this ideology, individuals are envisioned as autonomous and fully responsible for their choices. The discourse employed was dominated by the vocabulary of *skills*, including the notion of teaching as a process based on the transfer of skills. Yet, self-spirituality brokers also adapted their consultancy toward strengthening classroom cohesion – an objective that embodies an entirely separate set of values, such as emphasizing national collectivistic values (Katriel and Neshet, 1986).

A similar characteristic of the work of brokers is described in Islam et al.'s (2017) study about the construction of mindfulness programs. The authors argue that the mindfulness concept can be read as an 'empty signifier' with regard to its capacity to encode and contain a range of social contradictions. They demonstrate how, in the course of mindfulness programs, these oppositions are framed in such a way as to align with dominant managerial perspectives. One can argue that the use of self-spirituality practices that may well evoke different (and even contradictory) meanings that suit the needs of specific audiences is mainly motivated by pragmatism.

In addition, on the basis of existing research, it can be argued that the attempts to domesticate spirituality involve several processes with a pragmatic orientation. First, brokers omit ideas, practices and language overtly associated with religion and mysticism. Such an approach was evident in the public schools discussed in this article; in for-profit organizations (Islam and Holm, 2016; Karjalainen et al., 2018; Zaidman et al., 2009); and in medical institutions (Fadlon, 2005; Kabat-Zinn, 2011; Zaidman, 2017). Second, in public schools as well as in for-profit organizations, brokers apply specific incremental tactics, such as the progressive disclosure of certain self-spirituality contents (or objects), depending on their assessment of the audience's receptivity to this (Islam and Holm, 2016; Karjalainen et al., 2018; Zaidman et al., 2009). They also use camouflage (Zaidman et al., 2009) and concealment (Zaidman et al., 2009). We found only minor evidence in our data relating to these latter two tactics.

Conclusion

The study of self-spirituality has tended to be preoccupied with the study of discourse. Instead, this study provides a perspective which focuses on the *practice* of the process of institutionalizing spirituality. The article offers an interpretive qualitative analysis of rich field-based data concerning the translation of self-spirituality into public schools. This yields two main contributions to our understanding of the topic.

First, our data show that self-spirituality brokers are actively involved in 'extending' the 'spiritual marketplace' (Redden, 2016; York, 2001). That said, their focus is not on the production of objects, but rather on the creation of new services. In schools, brokers are involved in the creation, translation, and introduction of various programs for pupils. Brokers are also involved in the creation and translation of consultancy services for for-profit organizations, and in the translation of meditation programs for health care

institutions and for-profit organizations (Islam et al., 2017; Kabat-Zinn, 2011; Zaidman et al., 2009). The study contributes to existing research by identifying the specific methods applied by brokers (e.g. boundary objects, services which evoke different meanings, domestication) toward the expansion of the self-spiritual services market into organizational life.

However, while the results of this study support the general claim regarding self-spirituality market orientation, we have consciously avoided taking an overly critical tone. We suggest that in order to solidify a more balanced view of self-spirituality in that regard, certain characteristics of self-spirituality culture should be considered from an emic perspective. We accept the argument that the subjective perspectives and experiences should be taken into account (e.g. Heelas, 2008; Redden, 2016; see also Watts, 2018). In our view, any consideration of the ethics of the translation of self-spirituality practices should consider the alternatives it introduces into the day-to-day reality of school children and employees in organizations. Taken from this perspective, and based on empirical data, it seems that at least to some extent, the translation of self-spirituality in organizations produces rich alternatives that not only confirm the status quo, but positively challenge it. Our analysis shows that several novel self-spirituality practices are indeed perceived as useful and valuable to organization members. This interpretation supports Heelas' (2008) argument that self-spirituality practices expand the horizons of participants, and that they introduce – at least to some extent – a humanistic ethicality in organizations.

It has been argued that one of the fundamental characteristics of self-spirituality is the belief in the existence of many possible – and valid – spiritual routes (Redden, 2016, quoting others); a reliance on diverse resources (Hanegraaff, 1998); and diverse ways of product creation (Zaidman et al., 2009) – all of which might explain the role of self-spirituality brokers in 'extending' the 'spiritual marketplace'. Thus, instead of a narrowly constructed argument highlighting the market orientation of self-spirituality, the article proposes a wider perspective, one that does not discard positive aspects of the process, nor its embeddedness in a particular culture and belief.

Our second contribution pertains to claims regarding the instrumentalism of self-spirituality (Brophy, 2015; Driscoll and Wiebe, 2007; Lips-Wiersma et al., 2009). An identifiable tendency in the data from public schools supports the argument that spirituality is constructed as a form of capital which enhances the capabilities of individuals. The results of this study show that in Israeli public schools, spirituality is translated, among other means, as a tool for reducing classroom violence; as a set of practices which can enhance pupil's learning competencies; or as capital that can guide pupils in shaping their future more effectively. While the first aspect of this translation demonstrates the instrumentality of self-spirituality as it accommodates the specific needs of public schools, the latter aspect of translation supports the general claims about self-spirituality becoming 'spiritual capitalism' in organizations. In schools and for-profit organizations, self-spirituality is often translated as a technique for achieving profit-oriented ends, as well as a tool for improving and increasing organizational competitiveness, effectiveness, and productivity (Islam et al., 2017; Islam and Holm, 2016; Karjalainen et al., 2018; Zaidman et al., 2009).

This study shows that in the main, the instrumentalism of self-spirituality is prevalent not only when it is enacted in for-profit organizations (Karjalainen et al., 2018), or as a fundamental principle in the discourse of the workplace (e.g. Brophy, 2015; Driscoll and Wiebe, 2007), but also in public schools. These findings are important because they demonstrate that even at an early age, and more particularly in sites dedicated to socialization, young people are exposed to self-spirituality practices construed in very specific ways.

However, the data from public schools also show that brokers translate self-spirituality practices in a way that is not always directly linked to instrumentality. Results show that certain self-spirituality practices (e.g. touch, yoga, and meditation) have certainly been translated in a way which maintains their core ideas: developing a 'healthy' connection with others; a focus on the body as a means of achieving greater well-being (Sointu and Woodhead, 2008); and a focus on holism and harmony (Ashforth and Pratt, 2003). Similarly, in for-profit organizations, brokers go to great lengths to introduce practices which can enhance the authenticity, intuition, awareness, and holism of participants (Zaidman et al., 2009). Otherwise, they incorporate ideas such as 'letting go', acceptance, and generosity in mindfulness programs (Islam and Holm, 2016; Karjalainen et al., 2018).

As for the claims regarding the instrumentalism of self-spirituality, we suggest that the knowledge acquired in previous management studies can illuminate the topic. We have learned that translation, as a process, involves the framing of the elements of one community's world-view in terms of another community (Pawlowski and Robey, 2004); and that the interests, frames of references, core values, and identity of organization members can have an impact on the translation process (Doorewaard and Bijsterveld, 2001; Fussel and George, 2000; Sevon, 1996).

Indeed, our data show that the particular process of the translation of self-spirituality solidifies over the course of interaction with different actors – particularly school principals, school teachers, and representatives of AF. We demonstrated that different actors often impose pressures on brokers to translate spirituality in a specific way, which reflects – for example – their identities as organization members, their core values, and their interests. For instance, ideas echoed across our data, through both the AF guidelines and the mandatory school requirement that admitted programs should possess structure, content, rationale, and other practices that underline the importance attributed to professionalism. Furthermore, in both phases of data collection, the widespread 'tools' metaphor used by schoolteachers, school principals, and the self-spirituality brokers themselves reflected the genuine nature of instrumentalism in spirituality as constructed by all actors.

Similar results, denoting how the translation of self-spirituality involves the positions and values of different organizational and non-organizational actors, can be seen in other studies. It has been noted that managers in for-profit organizations (like other actors, such as school principals, school teachers, and parents) are often involved in the translation process (Karjalainen et al., 2018; Zaidman and Goldstein-Gidoni, 2011). In other words, we argue that to some degree, the translation of self-spirituality into mainstream organizations reflects not only the core ideas of this culture, but also the values and perspectives of the other organizational actors

involved in the process. Indeed, in numerous Israeli settings where people experience or consume self-spirituality practices (yoga and meditation, for example) outside the context of their work organizations, the presentation of these practices can be significantly different. It may include, for instance, a discourse and practices related to notions that explicitly represent certain core ideas of self-spirituality culture, such as enlightenment.

In summary, based on knowledge from research into the translation of cultural concepts, the empirical data show that self-spirituality is modeled in a specific direction, that is, instrumentalism, as is suggested by existing research; but, it also identifies the interactional dynamics that explain the emergence of this particular direction taken in the translation of self-spirituality into organizations. We have demonstrated that when brokers translate new ideas, they must consider the values and interests of the actors who are involved in the process. Our study shows (as do others) that instrumentalism is a core value in Western organizations.

Finally, another contribution of this study is in showing that institutional contexts (in our case, for-profit and non-profit organizations, including the interests and ideologies that they represent) shape the discursive meanings of self-spirituality in significant ways. It implies that focusing on the discourse of self-spirituality, without reference to the particular institutional contexts in which it is enacted, is not sufficient and in fact might be misleading.

Future research should further investigate under what 'structures', conditions and 'brokers work' self-spirituality has been successfully institutionalized in mainstream organizations.

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Appendices

Appendix A

The core questions for brokers were as follows:

- Please describe your work or program at public schools.
- What do the principal, teachers, and parents expect from it?
- What was the response to the program?
- What aspects of the program were accepted or rejected, by whom and why?
- What changes were made in the program over the years?

The core questions for school principals and teachers were as follows:

- Please tell me about the program: what were the circumstances and reasons for introducing it to the school?
- What were your expectations from the program?
- How has the program been incorporated at school?
- What were the children's and parents' responses to it?
- Please tell me about the incorporation of the program over time.

Appendix B

Group interview with AF staff: the research manager, the manager of the pedagogical department, and the CEO. The questions were as follows:

- Please describe the situation regarding the alternative programs that are currently run by the AF.
- What kinds of programs were rejected, by whom and why?
- What changes were made in programs to fit in?
- Which programs continued for a long period of time?