Conceptions of Self across Eastern and Western Traditions: An enquiry into managerial relevance

by

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Introduction

The world of business, the world over, is waking up to a new direction for the future. Over the past decade, there is growing evidence of the ‘spirituality in the workplace’ or ‘spirit at work’ movement in the professional fields. (Mitroff and Denton, 1999) Quite a few researchers have indicated that integration of spirituality and management offers managers a source of enduring meaning in turbulent times. (McCormick, 1994; King and Nicol, 1999; Terez, 1997) So widespread has this movement been that the academic landscape today is peppered with its sprinkling as well. (Gibbons, 2000 for an excellent overview) Recognizing its importance, the Academy of Management constituted in 1999 a Management, Spirituality and Religion Special Interest Group to look into the issues involved and to suggest future directions. Many dissertations and research articles bearing on the field have been published over the last few years. (Neal, 2001; Cavanagh, 1999)

Not surprisingly, researchers have tried to identify the reasons behind this upsurge of interest in this spiritual search. While the impact of lack of security in the current work place is an obvious reason (Cavanagh, 1999), a common theme emerging from the literature on the subject suggests that “search for meaning” is the elusive factor pushing managers and workers alike, onward in the spiritual quest. (Neal, 1997) Besides, recent interest in business ethics could also be a significant factor contributing to the increased involvement in spirituality (Harris, 2000).

This search for meaning in an organizational context assumes importance in light of the central position that work has come to acquire in the life of an organizational worker (Konz and Ryan, 1999). The form of connectedness thereby between the organization and the individual has been variously described, among them arguably the most popular being Schein’s Psychological Contract. According to Schein (1983):
The notion of a psychological contract implies that the individual has a variety of expectations of the organization and that the organization has a variety of expectations of him. These expectations not only cover how much work is to be performed for how much pay, but also involve the whole pattern of rights, privileges, and obligations between worker and organizations. For example, the worker may expect the company not to fire him after he has worked for a certain number of years and the company may expect that the worker will not run down the company’s public image or give away company secrets to competitors. Expectations such as these are not written into any formal agreement between employer and organization, yet they operate powerfully as determinants of behavior.

In fact, Schein was only borrowing a term that was originally employed by Argyris and Levinson in the 1960s to characterize the subjective nature of the employment relationship. Rousseau (1994) defined the psychological contract of employment as “the understandings people have, whether written or unwritten, regarding the commitments made between themselves and their organization”. Hiltrop (1996) further elaborates on the Psychological Contract quoting Rousseau, “the understandings people have, whether written or unwritten, regarding the commitments made between themselves and the organization.”

Elaborating upon the unstated 'objects' of exchange in Schein’s theory, Carr and Zanetti (2000) suggest, “The relationship between employer and organization... are deep seated and largely unconscious”.

Furthermore, recent researchers have begun to question the continued validity of this construct. Collin (1996) in the forceful article “Organizations and the end of the individual?” argues that the construct of Psychological Contract was valid as long as the individual and the organization were regarded as separate entities. Such may no longer be the case in the emerging business scene. Collin also proposes that a new construct be developed that captures the meaning of not only the interdependence but also “interpenetration”.
However, be that as it may, it is our contention that the unconscious relationship Carr and Zanetti refer to could be an outcome of the ‘Self-Other’ orientation of the individual and would thus explain King and Nicol (1999)’s ‘sense of desolation that prompts the spiritual journey.’ King and Nicol in trying to explain the spiritual journey present it as “…a process of focusing within, in order to gain an awareness of Self.” It has been the common assertion of the wisdom literature from world over that this awareness of self helps one find the Centre within and thus discover a transcendental meaning and purpose in life and work. It would further help one overcome the divide between the inner life-outer life dichotomy inherent in the workplace and thus seamlessly integrate all the details of one’s life.

It would be illuminating to focus upon the various conceptions of self across traditions to see if these have a bearing on the attitude one takes to Spirituality in the workplace in particular and the self-other relationship in general.

**Method**

The present study relied on the available secondary data in the fields of Philosophy, Psychology, Anthropology and Religion. The data was then compiled to facilitate comparison and bring out the essential features inherent in the eastern and western traditions.

In this report, we will first survey three important theoreticians from the western tradition to unravel the view of the Self that they take and follow it up with a general introduction to the living ideology from the east. We will then elaborate upon one of the many formulations developed in the East to understand Self’s conception there. Various reports have come in that try to synthesize these disparate formulations, it is these we turn our attention to next. Hereafter, we try to summarize the positions that we have seen and try to suggest directions for the future.
Discussion

William James—the philosopher, theologian, and psychologist—termed the self, "the most puzzling puzzle with which psychology has to deal" (James, 1890). However, despite James’ lucid writing about the self and a century of research and writing since, the human self remains a puzzle. James indeed eased the research by distinguishing between “the self as knower and I, the pure Ego” and enabled the researchers to focus upon me, the known instead of speculating about I, the knower.

Since then the scholars have tried to illumine the subject by focusing upon the constitution and development of the Self and its interaction with the ‘Other’ (Goethals and Strauss, 1991: for an excellent overview on the historical perspectives). Indeed, the different scholars have tried to dwell in the way a person tries to relate oneself with the environment and the relation’s cultural context. “Private Self” (Rosch, 1997), “Individualistic self” (Baldine, 1997), “Social self” (Mead, 1913), “Familial self” (Roland, 1991), “Looking-Glass Self” (Cooley, 1902), “Conceptual self” (Neisser, 1997), “Relational Self” (Jordan, 1991), “Public and private selves” (Morin, 1998) have just been a few amongst the many terms offered in the explanation of the ways people perceive themselves and their world.

Western heritage:

The western tradition is commonly acknowledged to be “imbued with a style of thinking based on dichotomy and binary opposition” (Carr and Zanetti, 2000). Carr and Zanetti quote Morris West who argues that even Western philosophy is steeped in a “separation thesis”. Not surprisingly, the ubiquitous nature of this “fundamental duality” (Noble, 1997) is reflected in western psychology as well, which carries forward this essential distinction between the notion of thinking subject—an observer—that stands in natural opposition to observable reality.
Neisser (1997) while referring to the above quotes Clifford Geertz who, in a memorable and oft-quoted passage, describes this “rather peculiar idea within the context of world cultures” thus:

The western conception of the person [is of] a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively against other such wholes and against its social and natural background.

William James

In seeking the roots of this tradition in western psychology, we are led to the legendary William James whose writings on the Self illuminated the territory. It bears noting that "The Consciousness of Self" is the longest chapter in the two volumes of the William James’ classic *The Principles of Psychology*

The most significant contribution of James – as we have noted earlier - lay in the differentiation he drew between the self as a knower, or the *I*, and the self as known, or *Me* in the first volume of his *The Principles of Psychology* (1890). The *I* is pure ego, consciousness itself. The *Me* is one of the many things that the *I* may be conscious of, and it consists of three components: (a) The material Self; (b) The social Self; and (c) The spiritual Self. He designated the *I* as ‘The pure Ego’. James was careful to point out that the two selves are discriminated aspects of self rather than "separate things."

True to his Pragmatic tradition, James would accept no evidence but that which can be substantiated by the senses. States William James in speaking of his conclusions about the Pure Ego, the 'self of selves', “That (in some persons at least) the part of the innermost Self which is most vividly felt turns out to consist for the most part of a collection of cephalic movements of 'adjustments'... I feel quite sure that these cephalic motions are the portions of my innermost activity of which I am most
distinctly aware”. James refuses to commit himself on the “obscurer portion” of the “Innermost Self” other than calling it “(a) mere principle of conscious identity” or an “Inner Principle of Personal Unity”. Indeed James restricts the scope of a psychologist’s domain by positing the accompanying schema. [James’ belief in God permeates his psychology and plays an important role in his understanding of self (particularly of the "I"). For example, his discussion of the soul as a combining medium of thought or consciousness is permeated with references to a spiritual being and the role that such a being may play in understanding an individual’s self.]

For James, the Absolute Self-consciousness/Reason or Experience could be broken up into Transcendental Ego and World, each containing respectively the Psychologist & the thought and the Thought’s Object & Psychologist’s Reality. Of these, only the last three are the Psychologist’s Object.

In keeping with the above schema, James also posits the existence of a ‘greater Self’ beyond the ‘private convulsive self’. Furthermore, James asserts that “…merging of the narrower private self into the wider or greater self, the spirit of the universe (which is our own ‘subconscious’ self)” would aid in unification of personality.

In discussing the formation of the Self James saw the source of all psychological disorders in the division of personality and thus to become a whole individual the process of unification becomes essential. It may come gradually, or it may occur abruptly: a firmness, stability and equilibrium succeeding a period of storm and stress and inconsistency.

New information, however acquired, plays an accelerating part in the changes; and the slow mutation of our instincts and propensities, under the ‘unimaginable touch of time’ has an enormous influence. Moreover, all these influences may work
subconsciously or half unconsciously. James considered Emotional occasions, especially violent ones, extremely potent in precipitating mental rearrangements. For the sudden conversions (the necessary element of unification of personality, in James’ conception), the subconscious forces take the lead. Indeed, James asserts that sudden conversion is connected with the possession of an active subliminal self.

James attributes the phenomena “...partly ...to explicitly conscious processes of thought and will, but as due largely also to the subconscious incubation and maturing of motives deposited by the experiences of life. When ripe, the results hatch out, or burst into flower.” In his analysis of the thinking "loop" that begins and ends in experience, James gives an important emphasis in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* to the unconscious. He stresses that the choices we make for action and the ideas we adopt to suit our purposes arise out of our unconscious needs.

With his empiricist background, William James insisted upon the practical proof of the Unified individual in one’s relationships with the ‘Others’ and indeed points at what may be expected of such a person: Devoutness, Tenderness and Charity, and Asceticism.

Indeed as the measure of saintliness (a Saint being a Unified individual), James asserts to the “(an) immense elation and freedom, as the outlines of the *confining selfhood* melt down”(emphasis mine) and thus the individual would be better able to participate in the larger life around him.

James goes on to suggest that the religious/mystical experiences occur as our "field of consciousness" increases. One can assert these "simple" experiences connote a slight widening of this field, whereas the more profound experiences come when consciousness expands to include items usually filtered, hidden, or just out of reach.
Such could include memories and sensations. As awareness increases to include more external and internal information, a sense of self, a boundary between self and environment, expands, and seems to dissipate. The experience is one of unity with information formerly defined as non-self. However, this expansion of the self, often referred to as loss of self, may not be beneficial for someone who does not have a "strong" sense of self to begin with. Unification of the Divided Self to render one a ‘whole person’, so to speak, is the goal of William James’ thesis.

_The wide variety of processes as varied as the people pursuing the path_, may well sum the essential thesis of James.

_Sigmund Freud_

Quite undoubtedly, one of the most influential of western psychologists has been Sigmund Freud. Moreover, although Goenthal’s and Strauss (1991) doubt if Freud ever had a theory of the self, Freud’s immense influence on the theorizing about the Self can not be denied.

Though quite elaborate by itself, in brief Freud’s thesis involved the notion that a human personality could be divided into three components: id, ego, and superego. The _id_ is the instinctual part of the personality and contains all the basic drives and emotions that come from the animal nature in humans. At the other extreme is the _superego_, which encompasses cultural values, ideals, and rules of conduct acquired from parents. There are two aspects to the superego: One is the _conscience_, which is an internalization of punishments and warnings. The other is called the _ego ideal_. It derives from rewards and positive models presented to the child. The conscience and ego ideal communicate their requirements to the ego with feelings like pride, shame, and guilt.
The id is always in conflict with the superego. To mediate between the id and the superego, people gradually build a third structure, called the ego. The role of the ego is to see that the drives of the id are reasonably fulfilled without disturbing the superego.

As for psyche’s development, Freudian notion is fairly complex involving the successive focusing of libido progressively leading to Oral stage, anal stage, Phallic stage, latency stage and lastly, the genital stage. Social demands for inhibition and control of the drives centre about the functions of these zones, and it is from this process of socialization that personality is said to emerge. Freud’s emphasis on biological and psychosexual motives in personality development was later augmented by Erik Erikson to include psychosocial and social factors.

Carr and Zanetti (2000) contend that true to the western tradition’s dichotomus heritage, even Freud’s division of ego and the ego-ideal echoes Hegel’s dialectic vision of self and other with the former enjoying a privileged position.

Moreover, what we find of interest is the fact that the knower of id, ego and superego will necessarily have to something/someone other than these three. And, Freud makes no assumptions about the former.

In Freud's language, as the child grows – and develops the self, the reality principle gradually begins to control the pleasure principle; the child learns that the environment does not always permit immediate gratification. The ego, thus becomes responsible for channeling the discharge of fundamental drives and for controlling intellectual and perceptual functions in the process of negotiating realistically with the outside world – the Other.
Clinical observations led Freud to believe that sexual ideas that were unacceptable to the conscious mind were repressed and became part of the unconscious. This unconscious then exerts the greatest influence in one’s relationships with the wider world outside.

In considering human life as an ongoing battle between the Life instinct and the Death instinct, Freud implicitly suggests that the goal of human life – and self-formation too! – would be to transcend this struggle.

*Carl Gustav Jung*

The most celebrated of all “Freudians”, Carl Gustav Jung soon broke away from his mentor and went on to attract a wide following himself. The founder of Transpersonal or Depth psychology had quite distinct views on the Self from Freud. Jung came far away from Freud’s assertion that matters sexual were of supreme importance in the formation of personality and instead placed spirituality in the foreground.

*Self, das Selbst,* is the term for totality that Jung took from the Hindu notion of *Brahman/Atman* and it is a term in which all opposites, all ambiguities of life are explicitly included. Self is *Brahman,* the great transcendental power, Creator of all life in all its aspects: Self is also *Atman* the centre of individual existence which can be experienced. For Jung it was a central, all-encompassing ordering principle, the Self.

“The fusion of the self with its relations to the object produces the identity of the self (atman) with the essence of the world...so that the identity of the inner with the outer atman is cognized.”

Hartman (1999) quotes Jung to state:

"I have chosen the term 'self' to designate the totality of man, the sum total of conscious and unconscious existence. I have chosen this term in accordance with Eastern philosophy, which for centuries has occupied itself with those
problems that arise when even the gods cease to become human. The philosophy of the Upanishads corresponds to a psychology that long ago recognized the relativity of the gods."

In Jung’s terminology, Self is the central archetype from which all other archetypes evolve. Self is the centre of the individual, the dynamic nucleus from which consciousness and the ego emerge. Self is at the centre between the world of inner reality, the collective unconscious, the vast hinterland of human evolution, and of outer reality, the comparatively limited world of consciousness. Nevertheless, Self is also the circle, the circumference which provides the protective boundary.

In *Analytical Psychology: Notes of the Seminar Given in 1925*, Jung says,

"I have represented the self as a point in the middle of the diagram, but it could just as well be thought of as including the whole, or indeed as spreading over all the world. Indian philosophy describes the self as I have taken it as being smaller than small, yet greater than great" (emphasis mine).

In the Jungian framework, one gets to *uncover* the self by becoming aware of more and more of its ‘components’. Thus one moves beyond the ordinary conscious experiences and goes on to identify the Unconscious areas of one’s Psyche in the following order: (i) ego and shadow; (ii) persona; (iii) anima and animus projections, and lastly (iv) Archetypes.

Self, being the totality, would subsume the Other in the Jungian view. However, as the subconscious – apart of the Self - makes itself available to the conscious only through projection, the Other is necessitated. To this extent, the relation of the Self to the Other would be that of a part being reflected upon for re-integration.

Two salient considerations in the issues of development of Self would be: (i) Whatever side an individual represses and does not attempt to make conscious will have to be met as an outer event and (ii) The disasters, which befall different types of people, are opportunities that life provides for coming to wholeness.
In considering the goal of these processes, Jung rejected the goal of perfection and put wholeness in its place. For Jung the natural urge to individuate would mean fulfilling one’s destiny / fate or living out one's myth. Individuation, therefore, means to allow the seed each one of is to be brought to its total fruition. It is a gradual process of going inward to discover our complexes and identifications and becoming free of them by transcending the opposites and polarities.

**Cross Cultural Studies**

Studies exploring the differences in the conceptions of self across cultures too have thrown up a variety of data indicating fundamental differences in the concepts of Self across the ‘East-West divide’. (Markus and Kitayama, 1991a and 1991b; Triandis, 1989) Markus and Kitayama contrast the American and Asian cultures and posit the existence of an Independent Self for the former and an Interdependent Self for the latter. Triandis (1989) argues that each one of us has three kinds of selves - private, public and collective - and different cultures would have distinctive constitutions of the three for an average individual. Further, this constitution would be dictated upon by the complexity, level of individualism and looseness of the culture. The kind of self operating in a particular culture would then become a major determinant of social behavior.

In summing up the various western approaches that we have reviewed here we would find that the profession, in general, has been true to the brief provided by William James in that it focuses upon the “Me” and not the “I”.

We would now proceed to undertake the journey from a different end altogether: the eastern.
**Eastern Traditions**

The Quest for Truth has engaged the eastern mind for longer than it has the western. Consequently, there have emerged varied rigorously developed systems to report the findings in the eastern traditions. And quite expectedly, these traditions and their formulations are too diverse to be bracketed in a single category.

The eastern philosophy, for all the generalization that the term may suggest, is not a monolith but an agglomeration of varied strands. It contains within itself varied streams: from the high spiritual flights of the Vedanta philosophy... to the low ideas of idolatry with its multifarious mythology, the agnosticism of the Buddhists, and the atheism of the Jains.

A unique feature of the eastern conceptions has been the verification of the philosophical assertions with the psychological experimentation. Accordingly, the nature of reality – as in Philosophy - too seems to get reflected in the structure of human personality as conceptualized ('realized’, should we say?) in eastern Psychology.

Having said this, we will now focus upon the Hindu traditions for a more elaborate exploration. We feel that it would be instructive to look at the world-view of the Hindu before we can get closer to the appreciation of their Concept of Self.

Sudhir Kakar (1978) in his insightful “The Inner World: A Psycho-analytic Study of Childhood and Society in India” refers to three essential ideas that shape the world-view of a Hindu:

1. **The theme of fusion — Moksha**

Kakar presents this essential ideal – the goal of life – in Hindu culture as the state in which “…all distinctions between subject and object have been transcended, a direct
experience of the fundamental unity of a human being with the infinite.” Presenting it thus, Kakar further posits it as the essential difference between the eastern and western cultures: whereas maintenance and strengthening of ego boundaries is considered the stuff of reality in western thought, the Indian would call it *maya* (an apparent reality that is not the ultimate, true reality). In a parallel fashion, Sri Ramakrishna, a renowned Indian saint, in his inimitable style explained it with the simile of a salt doll that tried to measure the depth of the ocean and lost itself in the quest.

Presenting this facet as the conflict between fusion and separation, a typical Hindu’s world-view would thus lean more towards Fusion. Thus, connectivity with the environment and Collectivism in the society would seem to define the individual in such a setting.

2. **Life task and life cycle – Dharma**

Kakar presents various views on this central concept as the means to approach the final end of *Moksha* detailed earlier and as the spirit rather than the content of human activities. Therefore, as long as the individual stays true to his unique *svadharma* – his own particular life-task – he would travel towards *Moksha*, the *summum-bonum* of life.

In a complementary understanding, in its social aspect, *Dharma* determines the legitimacy of social institutions rather than the institutions’ utilitarian functions.

In its third avatar, *Dharma* is seen as an image of the life cycle in the sense of *ashrama-dharma* from which Erikson borrowed his latter ideas of psychosocial stages of growth. It thus puts forward the idea that each stage of one’s life may have
corresponding duties and obligations that would help one take those steps towards *Moksha*.

3. **Ideas of Time and Destiny – Karma**

The third essential idea in the Hindu world image exerts its powerful influence in influencing a Hindu's perception of time and forming one’s cosmology. Inextricably linked to the idea of *Samskaras* (impressions on mind-stuff), Karma puts the destiny of an individual in his/her own hands. To quote Swami Vivekananda (1993): “If what we are now has been the result of our own past actions, it certainly follows that whatever we wish to be in the future can be produced by our present actions.”

Thus, according to Kakar, “...the pre-conscious system of beliefs and values associated with the concepts of *moksha*, *dharma* and *karma* forms the meta-reality for Hindus.” It will, therefore, be these values and beliefs that would extend to form the concept of Self for a Hindu.

We would now move onto the basic terminology used in the Hindu tradition. The reality considered as the innermost Self – the Microcosm – of any particular creature or object, is called the Atman. When the Reality is spoken of in its universal aspect – the Macrocosm, it is called *Brahman*. (The same reality is seen in its two relations to the cosmos. And thus they are not two, but one.)

Having gone through the fundamental constructs of a Hindu world-image perhaps it would be instructive if we consider the evolution of the Universe as it is presented in *Vedanta* philosophy before we launch into an exposition of its *structure* of the Self.

According to the Hindu philosophy creation is described as an evolution outward, from undifferentiated into differentiated consciousness, from mind into matter. Pure consciousness is, as it were, gradually covered by successive layers of ignorance
and differentiation, each layer being grosser and thicker than the one below it, until
the process ends on the outer physical surface of the visible and tangible world.

The story begins with the elemental undifferentiated stuff of mind and matter –
*Prakriti*, which is composed of three forces: *sattwa, rajas, and tamas*- where the
imbalance between the three forces launches the re/creation of the universe. The
first stage of evolution is *Mahat*, “the great cause.” *Mahat* is the cosmic ego -sense,
the first drawing of differentiated consciousness. From *Mahat* evolves the *buddhi*,
the discriminating faculty; from *buddhi* evolves *ahamkara*, the individual ego -sense.
From *ahamkara* the lines of evolution branches off in three different directions – to
produce *manas*, the recording faculty; the five powers of perception (sight, smell,
hearing, taste and touch); the five organs of action (tongue, feet, hands and the
organs of evacuation and procreation); and the five *tanmatra* s, which are the subtle
inner essences of sound, feelings, aspect, flavour and odour. These subtle *tanmatra* s,
combining and recombining, are then said to produce the five gross
elements-earth, water, fire, air and ether, of which the entire universe is composed.

It would be necessary to keep this idea of evolution in mind if we are to understand
the Hindu idea of human personality, which is revealed through meditation. What
begins with concentration upon an external object progressively takes the meditator
within, moving from the gross to the subtle till one has pierced the veil of ‘this’ and
‘that’ to gaze at the undifferentiated wholeness that one is – in essence.

Swami Prabhavananda in his exposition of *Patanjali Yoga Sutras* (1999) describes
four stages of concentration – a movement contrasting that of creation – starting
from that stage of concentration upon one of the “gross elements”. This is followed
by the stage of “discrimination”, where the mind pierces the outer material layer and
fastens upon the “*tanmatra*”, the subtle essence within. Next comes the stage of
“joyful peace”, where one concentrate upon the inner powers of perception or upon the mind itself. Finally, there is the stage of “simple awareness of individuality”, when one concentrates upon the ego-sense in its simplest, most elemental form-untouched by any fear or desire-knowing only that “I” am other than “this” or “that”.

Further, the next level of concentration would enable the concentration to go deeper than all objects and unite itself with pure, undifferentiated consciousness.

We have mentioned earlier, but it bears repetition, that Self has been conceived of in various ways in the Hindu tradition. We would remember from the foregoing discussion that Atman is blemish-less and stainless. However to account for its “seemingly” getting mired into the “not-I” the Hindu would proffer the thesis of its getting ensnared into something(s) other than itself.

A common formulation in this arena has been that of “Sheaths”. This concept further takes two forms:

One of these forms postulates that the Atman is covered by five sheaths, each sheath becoming progressively more gross and more tangible than the earlier one (an excellent exposition appears in Taittiriya Upanishad, from Part III Chapter ii to Part III Chapter vi). Seeking to be taught the Brahman, the disciple is asked by his teacher to practice concentration. The disciple progressively goes into the subtler dimensions starting with the grossest covering produced by food (Annamaya kosha). The next is the vial sheath of Pranamaya kosha, thereafter comes the mental sheath (Manomaya kosha), followed by the sheath of the intellect (Vijjanamaya kosha) and finally appears the Anandamaya kosha.
The other description - as in Patanjali Yoga Sutras (I.38) - would consider the Atman in man to be covered by three layers or “sheaths”. The outermost of these is the Physical Sheath (*Sthula Sharira*), which is the layer of gross matter. Below this is the Subtle Sheath (*Sukshma Sharira*) which is composed of the inner essence of things, and is the stuff of the spirit world. Below this is the Causal sheath (*Kaarana Sharira*), so called because it is the web of our karma, the complex of cause and effect that makes our personalities and our lives what they are at a given moment. The Causal Sheath is the ego-sense that makes us see the phenomena of the universe and ourselves as separate entities. In the waking state, Vedanta informs us, all these three states come between the Atman and us, but in dreamless sleep the two outer coverings are removed and only the causal sheath, the ego-sense, remains.

The Hindu philosophy conceives of three states of existence: waking (*Jagrta*), dream (*Swapna*) and deep dreamless sleep (*Sushupti*). These states are based on another state that forms the unobservable backdrop: the *Turiya*. The *Turiya* has been variously described: THE self that is identical with the larger Self, the immanent reality, etc. Further, the three experiential states of Deep sleep, Dream and Waking are linked to the three bodies: Causal (*Kaarana*), Subtle (*Sukshma*) and Gross (*Sthula*) respectively. Further, the continuity of experience across the three states would make it necessary for the Hindu philosopher to admit a permanent Self underlying all contents of consciousness. (Prabhavananda, 1999)

We shall now present the model presented by one of the foremost Indian saints of the 20th century – Sri Ramana Maharshi - as an illustrative exposition on the way Self has been conceptualized in Indian *Vedantic* tradition. (It helps that the abstract nature of the concept has been illustrated with a diagram to help us grasp the idea!)
The Self which is the lamp (1) shines of its own accord in the inner chamber, i.e., the causal body (7) that is endowed with nescience as the inner wall (4) and sleep as the door (2); when by the vital principle as conditioned by time, karma, etc., the sleep-door is opened, there occurs a reflection of the Self in the egoity-mirror (5) that is placed next to the door-step-Mahat-tattva; the egoity-mirror (the first stage of differentiated consciousness, the cosmic ego-sense) thus illumines the middle chamber, i.e., the dream state (8), and, through the windows which are the five cognitive sense-organs (6), the outer court, i.e., the waking state. When, again, by the vital principle as conditioned by time, karma, etc., the sleep-door gets shut, the egoity ceases along with waking and dream, and the Self alone ever shines. The example just given explains how the Self is unmoving, how there is difference between the Self and the egoity, and how the three states of experience, the three bodies, etc., appear.

It would be apparent from the above description that the Hindu adroitly sidesteps the question of the Self and the Other by positing the existence of one all-comprehending existence. Further, the Hindu would insist that it is the One that appears manifold by the interposition of name and form described by the metaphor of waves and the sea. Indeed, asserts Swami Vivekananda in his lecture “The Real and The Apparent Man”,

According to the Advaita philosophy, then, this Maya or ignorance—or name and form, or, as it has been called in Europe, “time, space, and causality”—is out of this one infinite Existence showing us the manifoldness of the universe; in substance, this universe is one.

Subsequently, there have been attempts to realign the western and eastern philosophies to place them in a single framework that would be able to account for each one’s strengths. The work of Ken Wilber (1979, 1984, and 1997) has been at the forefront of this synthesizing movement for a long time now. In his No Boundary:
Eastern and Western Approaches to Personal Growth (1979) Wilber’s thesis has been that the individuals create “persistent alienation from ourselves, from others, and from the world by fracturing our present experience into different parts, separated by boundaries”.

Wilber further argues that there could be several levels of identity available to an individual, each one making available yet another level of fragmentation and separation. From the base where one would feel oneness with the Universe-in Unity Consciousness—one could progressively move up the ladder of separation through Total Organism (the barrier between Total Organism and Environment); Ego Level (the barrier between Ego and Body) to the final Persona Level with its boundary between persona and shadow. Wilber also contends that each of these self/not-self boundaries also determines the fault lines along which future battles of existence would have to be fought. The various therapies and ideologies available for integration aim at different levels of this divide and thus are not necessarily antagonistic to each other but are complementary in their approaches.

There have been attempts at scientifically validating the impact of the various meditation disciplines advocated in the eastern traditions. (Engler, 1985; Epstein and Lieff, 1985) These have served to bring out the implicit assumptions inherent in
western psychology and compared the positions of the two traditions. Engler, for instance, compares the Buddhist psychology with psychoanalytic Object Relations theory and comments that the two seem to “define the essence of the ego in a similar way... (as) a feeling of being and ongoingness in existence”. Engler also examines the Buddhist meditation practices and observes that these practices assume a cohesive and integrated sense of self for the individual to be able to take its rigors. Further, Buddhist practices are seen to affect a continuation of object relations development to reach Freudian “ideal fiction” and Buddha’s “end of suffering”.

Observing that Western Psychology remains “stunted”, Engler almost paves the ground for Wilber’s approach by issuing a call for the advance in the direction of the a developmental psychology that would include the full development spectrum.

Epstein and Lieff, on the other hand, examine the effects of meditation practices and their side effects in terms of psychoanalytic principles. They conclude that the meditation practices could be used both for adaptive and defensive purposes. In recalling Freud’s assertion that the spiritual urge – as in the Oceanic feeling - seeks a restoration of “limitless narcissism”, Epstein and Leiff contend that these “adaptive” regressive states may help the subject uncover and resolve the unresolved conflicts and drives embodied. However, the primitive material uncovered could lead to complications if ego strength is not sufficient to withstand or contain their force.

It would be apparent from our discussions earlier that the fundamental conceptions of self would inform one’s relationship with the world at large. It has been our contention that the different constructs and understandings of the self would motivate their adherents to relate in different ways to the other. In this section, we would seek to understand the implications of such a relation in the work setting for an individual.
We had argued at the outset that the current interest in spirituality at work could be the result of a renewed search for meaning in the context of the centrality of work in the life of an individual. We return to that theme here as we remember that the essentially “meaninglessness” of the majority of tasks in an industrial society has been commented upon by Marx, Durkheim and other thinkers. The industrial society that is seen to be leading to “alienation” (as in Marx) and “anomie” (as in Durkheim) does not seem to have come up with some credible solutions to this quest for meaning.

We also cannot ignore the factors that have accompanied the advent of technological breakthroughs. Heckman (2001) in her review of Sally Helgesen’s *Thriving in 24/7: Six Strategies for taming the world of work* describes the new world of work with an acronym, VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity). In addition to the above, Heckman adds the dimensions of increased globalization, increased pressure to work long hours, breakdown of traditional barriers between work and home, and the increased work involved in maintaining personal lives and leisure time that have further queered the pitch at the work-place.

In a parallel tone, DeFrank and Ivancevich in their Academy of Management Executive article (1998) focus on the aspect of increasing costs attributable to Stress and recommend

> The potential negative ramifications of stress for companies and their employees are so substantial that it is crucial that managers act to aid their employees in the development of their coping skills and to reduce excessive stress in the workplace itself.

DeFrank and Ivancevich also refer to the additional stressful factors that raise concern in modern times: Competition and Change; Technological Change; an Increasingly diverse workforce; Downsizing; Employee Empowerment and
Teamwork; Work/Home conflict; Elder and Child Care and Violence in the Workplace.

What would be clear is that these issues shed further light on the price that has had to be paid for progress. Fromm (1976), in his “To Have or To Be?” had earlier focussed upon the idea that the modern industrial society seems to be obsessed with the thought that possessions are the be-all and end-all of life. In doing so, the man has lost touch with the perennial wisdom of “Be-ing”.

Indeed, the struggle between the two modes of existence has not escaped the attention of contemporary academicians either. Neal et al (1999), in their paper “Spiritual perspectives in individual, organizational and societal transformation” suggest that the persistent calls for individual, organizational and societal transformation stem from the continued existence of a paradigm that seems to have run its course and that we are standing at the threshold of a more significant transition. The “command-and-control” management paradigm days are long past, they suggest and instead quote Hench to recommend that the managers need to see management as “A continuous learning process for creating meaning and value through service with and for others”.

Yet another theorist Gustavsson (2001) in his contribution Towards a transcendent epistemology of organizations: New foundations for organizational change takes the post-modernist position and suggests that

...the present understanding of organizations is based on interactive consciousness and needs to move beyond that level in order to progress. An alternative transcendent epistemology of organizations is introduced, based on transcendent experience, and suggests a model of organization based on the transcendent epistemology. This model features a transcendent transition - transcition - as a basis for organizational change.

Gustavsson goes on to suggest that present management thinking that conceives of the employees as only mind-body resource complexes will need to deepen its
conception and instead focus upon consciousness as the fundamental unit for an organization. He further contends that the new perspective holds the promise of harmonizing Organizational development with human development making management and organizational sciences “truly humanistic disciplines”.

Neal et al (1999) in a similar vein refer to Banner and Gagne to argue that the future paradigm will be characterized by an awareness of the interconnectedness; a holistic outlook; harmony and integration as a result of alignment with life. Not surprisingly, these are the issues that Malik (1997) too focuses on when he contrasts the dominant western paradigm with the eastern. For him the world-view of the non-western world emphasizes “interconnectedness, simultaneity and multilayeredness of reality; ...a seamless whole, a continuum... within a unified Force-Field, Energy or Consciousness” (Malik: 1997).

We believe that the aforementioned references show quite clearly that a transformation in the basic world-view is sweeping the landscape. On its way out is the dominant world-view emphasizing the ‘broken totality’ manifesting in splits within man himself, between man and society and between man and nature. It is evident that rooted as these ideas were in the empiricist tradition, with the self merely reflecting or responding to the objective reality outside, they could not but not overcome the dichotomy between the individual and one’s environment. “Freedom, then,” as Roy (1984: p. 50) had remarked wryly, “… consists in being disengaged from the outer world, to drain it of its significance and to control it and to bend it in one’s own will to serve one’s ends.”

In contrast to the above outlook, the present movement towards the issues of interconnectedness and the other factors described earlier prompted Bell and Taylor (2001) to contend in their *The Resacralization of Work* that the current surge of
interest in this field portrays the “work organization... as a source of spiritual growth that can enable the discovery of an interconnected purpose and innermost being”.

We believe that all the above research that we have quoted points to a specific direction for the conception of work. At its roots is the belief of interconnectedness, which we believe, comes closer to the Indian conception of the Self that we have described earlier. Hence, it would not be surprising if we find further Organizational research going further back into the past to reconfirm its moorings than staking a claim for a certain knowledge in the womb of the future.

With the emphasis upon the transcendent and the trans-rational, it would only be befitting to assume that the petty concerns of the daily frictions in the workplace would cease to occupy so much of one’s mind and that the employees would thus be able to come closer to the idea of “Freedom”. The employees would then approach their duties as the opportunities to manifest the growing freedom within. A freedom from the fetters of the mind-body complex and the associated needs and wants, which will probably be regarded as MAYA when the individual would try to attain to the transcendental by using properly the phenomenological reality one is confronted with daily.

**Conclusion**

In this paper, we have looked at the various conceptions of the self as they prevail in the east and the west. In particular, we surveyed the ideas of William James, Freud and Jung to uncover the basic structure and processes that inform their ideas. We found that their ideas, being a product of the western “separatist thesis” divide the world into the observed and the observer.
A look at the representative model from the east elucidated the idea that the idea of a Self is a chimera and that beneath the apparent manifold-ness of names and forms it is ultimately One that has become the many.

We also looked at the various attempts at realignment of the eastern and western paradigms. While a few of them have gone into scientific validations of the Unitary experiences the rest have chosen to focus on developing an integrative framework to accommodate the various perspectives.

We returned to the organizational experiences to find that the till-now dominant world-view of ‘broken-totality’ is yielding ground to the inter-connected, holistic paradigm that would focus upon a meaning derived from one’s Be-ing.

However, the issues of organizational relationships – and that of the ‘Organizational Contract’ in particular – would need to be reworked drastically in such a scenario. The traditional forms of organizational contract are based on the assumptions of duality. It would be interesting to see this conceptualization from a philosophy that sees the world as one. How the traditional self and the other are able to engage in transactions in such a scenario would surely raise epistemological issues for the researcher to shift it probably to what Gustavsson terms a “transcendent epistemology”.

The “spirit-at-work” movement too would need to be validated by empirical research to place today’s claims in their proper perspective and thus help it make its contributions to academic theory, management practice and an individual’s search for meaning and purpose at work.
Yet, in spite of these gaps in the present understanding of the workings of a developing paradigm we can sure of an inexorability: a major revision in our present understanding of the individual-organization relationship is called for.

And, by the time we come to grips with it we just may realize that we are face to face with the past.
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