

### Box 11.1 Opening case

#### What are tech giants doing in the realm of spirituality in the workplace?

Leadership coach and strategic advisor Lisa Villeneuve reports that ‘spiritual organisations truly value contribution, creativity, inclusion, and personal development, which contribute to healthy, happy, and productive employees’. She asserts that we all have the power to shape our culture within our sphere of influence, creating spaces where spirituality can thrive. A sense of purpose and connection are critical for employees to be committed and to contribute their best performance. Lisa provides examples of companies like Starbucks, Southwest Airlines, and Staples that are integrating spirituality through initiatives such as servant leadership: focusing on working in service to others for the greater good. Lisa also cites research that practices like generosity, gratitude, compassion, and **mindfulness** meditation are skills that support spirituality and well-being (Villeneuve, 2016).

Leaders of tech giants are realising that employees want new tools to solve ‘age-old’ problems such as stress, focus, and relationships. They are not fixing the problems with an app or a new productivity system, but by bringing in the practices of spirituality in the workplace. Twitter cofounder Evan Williams founded the ‘Medium’ open platform where readers find insightful thinking, and where creators can share their writing on any topic. To enable the process, he placed a room in the middle of the office where yoga and meditation could be practised (Fast Company, 2016). Another tech company that brings tech leaders and teachers together, Wisdom 2.0, addresses the challenge of not only living connected to one another through technology, but doing so in ways that are beneficial to people’s well-being, effectiveness at work, and being useful to the world (Wisdom, 2023). The founder Soren Gordhamer says ‘We are in the middle of a culture shift; we are no longer interested in just getting through our workday and striving towards relief at the end of our careers. It’s about more quality and connection within the work-life continuum’.

In the last couple of decades, well-known multinationals (and mostly technology companies) have shown interest and embarked on programmes using spirituality practices to cope with stress and anxiety. Some of these programmes are listed below:

- Intel’s Awake@Intel is an employee mindfulness training programme which consists of 90-minute weekly sessions that combine meditation, breathing, and journaling. On completion, participants have reported improved interaction with peers and direct reports, increased focus, decreased stress, and an ability to solve problems more quickly. They also reported a two-point increase in new ideas, insights, mental clarity, creativity, focus, quality of relationships, and engagement in work, leading to an overall improvement in team performance.
- Google’s ‘Search Inside Yourself’ is a course that teaches emotional intelligence through meditation. The course follows a three-part structure – (1) focusing on training attention, (2) developing self-knowledge and self-mastery, and (3)

developing useful mental habits – that teaches emotional intelligence, boosts resilience to stress and improves mental focus. Participants have reported being calmer, more patient, better able to listen, and better at handling stress and defusing emotions.

- Aetna, an American healthcare company, has established a Mindfulness Centre at their headquarters for mindfulness and meditation training of employees with two programmes – Viniyoga Stress Reduction and Mindfulness at Work. Results show a reduction in medical claims, an increase in productivity, and a reduction in stress.
- General Mills, a US-based food company, has been offering mindfulness programmes to its employees in its Minneapolis headquarters since 2006. The courses are designed to improve employee focus, clarity, and creativity. The company also offers weekly meditation sessions and yoga classes, and it has a dedicated meditation room in every building on its campus.

Sources:

Fast Company (2016)

Schaufenbuel (2015)

Offyoga (2021)

Villeneuve (2016)

Aetna (2023)

Wisdom (2023)

## 11.1 Introduction

The opening case shows how large technology companies, in the last couple of decades, have taken on board programmes to deliver spirituality-related activities to their employees, and raises the question: what are the motivations for these organisations to undertake such activities and what has changed? In the wake of the scandals that have occurred over the last several decades (and possibly centuries), organisations (for-profits and not-for-profits), governments, and international bodies (the United Nations for example) have frequently introduced and incorporated guidelines, policies, rules, legislations, laws, and codes to guide us to ‘do the right thing’ for all stakeholders. However, as Flynn and Werhane (2022: 2) ask, ‘Are the leaders of banking, commerce, business, and politics listening to and applying the prevailing ethical discourse or are they merely protecting themselves and their respective constituencies against fault and/or blame in the face of grave difficulties by tangential recourse to ethics?’ They suggest an ethical leadership process model that includes the role of virtue, conscience, servant leadership, and spirituality. They note that in the Harvard Business Association’s 1958 conference, spiritual values were identified as linked to the nature and strength of businesses. Every major speaker at that conference stressed the importance of more attention to spiritual values. The significance of spirituality in business was