



**Doctoral School  
of Management  
and Business  
Administration**

## **THESIS SUMMARY**

**Natasha Gjorevska**

**Workplace Spirituality and Well-Being  
among the Workforce in Social  
Businesses in Scotland**

PhD Thesis

**Supervisor:**

**Dr. Takács Sándor, PhD**  
Professor

Budapest, 2020

**Department of Organizational Behavior**

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## **I. Theoretical background**

This study draws from the research on workplace spirituality and well-being in connection to the context of social businesses involved in alternative food production and provision. This study's focal points of interest are workforce motives and well-being in the specific context of organizations that have a social mission beyond making profit.

For the purpose of this study, workplace spirituality is described as work performed by individuals that has broader societal implications (Sheep 2006), which includes a holistic mindset with a sense of mission and interconnectedness (Mitroff & Denton 1999, Sendjaya 2007) and transcendent motives as connection, compassion, meaningfulness, mindfulness (Guillén et al. 2015). Spiritual leaders are described as individuals who focus on value creation over value capture (Kauanui et al. 2010), consider the quality of their organization's products (Pruzan 2008), contribute to society to make a difference (Fry 2003), and care for multiple stakeholders (Fry 2003, Reave 2005, Zsolnai 2011). Spiritually-informed workplace and leadership behaviors are driven by transcendental motives of selfless needs to improve the lives of employees, community, the society, the environment (Guillén et al. 2015, Ungvári-Zrínyi 2014, Mitroff & Denton 1999). Workplace spirituality and

spiritual leadership have been associated with many beneficial outcomes such as high morale, commitment, less stress and ethical behavior (Fry 2003, Mitroff & Denton 1999, McGhee & Grant 2017, Karakas 2010).

Connecting the literatures on well-being and workplace spirituality, there is a similarity between spirituality and the psychological approaches such as eudaimonia and flow. A spiritual approach supports psychological aspects of well-being through purpose in life, service to others, while psychological approaches such as eudaimonia and flow seem to support spiritual experiences. There is a lot of similarity and overlap between these concepts. For instance, eudaimonia is about human flourishing and manifesting the inner spirit or true nature (Waterman 1993, Van Dierendonck & Mohan, 2006), and it is not a momentary orientation but a lifetime of virtuous action and an activity of the soul (Aristotle 2014). Eudaimonia includes focus on meaningful activities relating to the bigger picture and doing the right thing, by having a holistic sense of self (Ryan & Deci 2001). Similarly, the spiritual outlook includes a sense of connection, compassion, mindfulness, meaningful work, transcendence (Guillén et al. 2015), interconnectedness, sense of mission, and a sense of wholeness or a holistic mindset (Mitroff & Denton 1999, Sendjaya 2007). Thus, eudaimonia is essential for the spiritual approach to work or

meaningful work orientation and spirituality is inclusive of eudaimonia (Van Dierendonck & Mohan 2006).

Furthermore, the flow experience is considered to be an expression of eudaimonia (Fullagar & Kelloway 2010) and workplace spirituality is linked to flow at work (e.g., Fry 2003, Ungvári-Zrínyi 2014). The concepts of mindfulness at work and meaningful job are consistent with Csikszentmihalyi's theory of flow (Ungvári-Zrínyi 2014, p. 6), which means that contributing to a worthwhile cause at work, for the benefit of others and self, as well as performing jobs that express the inner values of people, can result in engaging the full capacity (flow) and attaining a high level of fulfillment in life. The spiritual and meaningfulness oriented approach accounts for eudaimonic experiences and offsets the destructive or negative aspect of flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1999). This puts into the perspective the importance of having a meaningful life over temporary enjoyment. Accordingly, jobs that take into account social consequences, allow for the expression of inner values at work and the experience of meaningfulness will support positive workplace well-being. The key characteristics common to spirituality, eudaimonia and flow are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Commonalities between spirituality, eudaimonia and flow

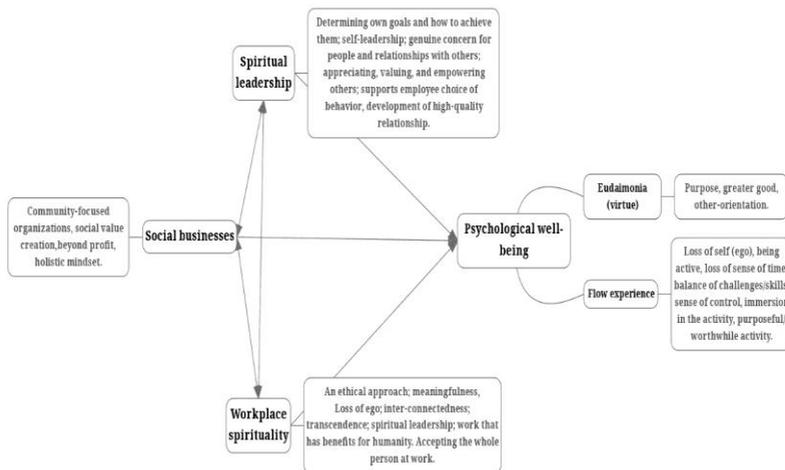
	<b>Phenomena</b>	<b>Key characteristics</b>
Workplace spirituality	Spiritual motives and values	Purpose, community, transcendence, self-actualization, other-actualization; Common with positive psychology: optimism, hope, humility, compassion, forgiveness, gratitude, love, altruism, empathy, toughness, meaningfulness; attunement with the self, harmony with self and others.
	Spiritual practices, manifestations (leadership)	Integrity, humanism, awareness, meaningfulness, responsibility, love, inner peace, truth, humility, sense of community, justice, service to others, honesty, empathy, trust, kindness, humility, equality, avoiding harm, self-work integration, appreciation, helpfulness, acceptance, listening, caring, self-leading.
Psychological well-being	Eudaimonic well-being	Psychological well-being, meaningfulness, virtues, gratitude, humility, mutuality, focus on the others, flourishing, doing well, acting with integrity, fully functioning, personal expressiveness, virtue, deeply held values, lifetime of virtuous action, in accordance with values and soul. Results in peak experience of flow, Includes a mentalist – spiritual view, Results in positive emotions.
	Flow	Engagement, peak experience, spiritual values, worthwhile work, autonomy, self-management, optimism, holism, meditation, meaningfulness, self-transcendent (spiritual) experience.

Scholars have argued that spiritually-informed workplace and leadership behaviors are driven by transcendental motives of selfless needs to improve the lives of employees, community, the society, and the environment (Guillén et al. 2015, Ungvári-Zrinyi 2014, Mitroff & Denton 1999), however, these assertions have not received much evidence in the organizational and business literature. Considering that healthy workplaces require for organizations to have a purposeful goal, surpassing profits (Bartlett & Ghoshal 1994) and social businesses exemplify such thinking by giving primacy to social purpose over profit (Teasdale 2012), to value creation over value capture (Santos 2012), this study explored the phenomena of workplace spirituality and well-being in the context of social businesses.

Certain studies have begun to explore the connection between spirituality and social entrepreneurship (see, for example, Kauanui et al. 2010), albeit the knowledge on spiritual motives and well-being in this field is still limited. Moreover, the relevance of well-being has been assessed mostly through a one-sided, hedonic and material perspective (Diener et al. 2006, Csikszentmihalyi 1999). This research fills the gap by addressing the still relatively under-explored but increasingly valuable and forward looking topics of workplace spirituality and eudaimonic well-being, by placing them in the increasingly relevant context of

social businesses. Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework of this research.

Figure 1 Conceptual framework



As shown in Figure 1, this research connects several disciplinary areas that have a core dimension in common and that is flourishing. Social businesses provide a fruitful ground for exploring spiritual approaches and experiences at work, which can potentially have positive psychological outcomes. The commonality between social businesses, spirituality and psychological well-being is the orientation towards creating value for others.

The goals of this research are threefold:

- 1) *Personal goals* – Strong personal interest to discuss achieving happiness and satisfaction at work and in life, by stress reduction at work, worker development and well-being; to promote compassionate work practices that are considerate of the many stakeholders as ecosystems within which organizations operate.
- 2) *Practical goals* – Impact on practitioners by inspiring them to adopt more positive motivational practices for running businesses and managing human resources; to show caring and compassionate practices in business settings, to illustrate that it is possible to incorporate and pursue both purpose and profit; to inform organizational practice and research towards contemplating alternative ways of organizing and working.
- 3) *Intellectual goals* – to contribute for better understanding of the human motivation process and well-being experiences at work; to provide insights from an empirical research about workforce motives and well-being experiences in the context of purposeful organizations, which can serve as an avenue of further exploration and study; personal development and knowledge through conducting this study.

Considering that the motivational aspects are crucial in understanding workplace spirituality, the point of departure of this project is the proposed broader conceptualization of human motivation which includes spiritual and ethical motives (see Guillén et al. 2015). In particular, whether making a contribution on improving the lives of others is a viable motive of conduct at work (e.g., see Fry 2003, Csikszentmihalyi 2003, Guillén et al. 2015), and how this affects different types of well-being, especially from the perspective of the eudaimonic approach. The dynamics between pro-self and pro-social motivations, as well as the interplay between material and spiritual orientations (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi 1999) is part of this perspective. The focus is on the individual level, as relevant for other levels, organizational and beyond, and on the relevance of leadership practices and behaviors in the workplace. With respect to the type of well-being outcomes on individual level, from a psychological perspective, there is little evidence on employee eudaimonic well-being experiences.

The context of interest are social businesses that are aligned with environmental sustainability as the ecological considerations are becoming an inevitable part of responsible organizing and can provide meaningful well-being outcomes (e.g., Starr 2010), with alternative organizing relating to food becoming relevant for such outcomes (Clark et al. 2019, Parasecoli 2018).

Therefore, the overarching research question is to explore the motives among individuals working in social businesses related to alternative food, and to understand whether, and if so, how, why and what type of well-being is experienced by individuals working in such context. Specifically, the research questions are as follows:

- Whether individuals in social businesses providing alternative food are driven by pro-social (spiritual) motives and if so, how individuals balance pro-self and pro-others outcomes?
- Whether individuals in social businesses providing alternative food are driven by spiritual motives and if so, how individuals balance material and spiritual outcomes?
- What are the work behaviors, processes and practices that contribute to workplace well-being, what types of well-being and for whom?
- Whether, and if so, how, why and what type of well-being individuals experience in social businesses providing alternative food?

## **II. Methodology**

This research utilized a qualitative, exploratory approach, which is aimed at understanding a

phenomenon in its natural setting (Denzin & Lincoln 1994), with a case study design aimed to understand the phenomena of interest within specific contextual conditions relevant to the phenomenon of study (Yin 2009).

This study analyzed contemporary workers' motives and well-being within certain context such as: a) the type of organization: social business, as conscious and multi-stakeholder oriented (people-society-environment) organization, and b) the type of industry, which is focusing on health/sustainable food initiatives. This fits well with the implications of people having spiritual motives to work in an organization that creates something of value to others, i.e., jobs that take into account social consequences, job characteristics, and personal characteristics (e.g., allow for the expression of inner values and the experience of meaningfulness). This context allows for exploring how and why people engage in that kind of context and how it affects their well-being. Case studies investigate a phenomenon in its real-life context and are recommended when there is a need to answer "how" and "why" questions, and to obtain an 'in-depth' understanding of contemporary social phenomena within their real-life context (Yin 2009).

The unit of analysis in this study is the individual and this research included more than one individual or "case", thus, utilized a multiple-case study approach

(Yin 2009), with an instrumental purpose to identify patterns and compare across the cases through studying specific case narrative (Stake 1995). This research has explored the idiosyncratic meanings (i.e., insights from the point of view of The Case) and looked at subjective episodes through which individuals construct meaning, make sense of their work and experience well-being in their daily work. The focus was on understanding the perspectives of individuals in various roles, and the context within which their perspectives emerge. This methodological choice enabled capturing of the complexity of participants' interpretations and it corresponds to the research tradition of interpretivism. Table 2 depicts the distinction between what is and what is not in focus of this research.

Table 2 Research focus

<b>In focus</b>	<b>Not in focus</b>
Workplace spirituality	Religious spirituality
Spiritual leadership	Other leadership approaches
Psychological well-being (eudaimonia and flow)	Other types of well-being
Intra-organizational or individual level	Organizational or inter-organizational level
Personal motives, roles, styles, behaviors and feelings	Organizational processes, systems

This study had two approaches. First, a collective case design was used to explore a single site (an organization) and to compare and contrast the individual case narratives within the context of one organization. Second, the study aimed to further explore the phenomena of interest across cases in different contexts and collect a larger number of narratives in different settings, thus, used a multiple case narrative approach to explore whether and where/with whom the phenomenon exists (Shkedi 2005). Table 3 presents information on both studies.

Table 3 Studies conducted

	<b>Collective case study</b>	<b>Multiple case narrative</b>
<i>Period of data collection</i>	March 2019	April 2019
<i>Research approach</i>	Interpretive - inductive	Interpretive - inductive
<i>Type of data</i>	Primary	Primary
<i>Varieties of data</i>	Triangulation between interviews, observation and documents	Interviews, impression of the site from the interview visit
<i>Data collection</i>	Qualitative methods: narrative interviews, observation, document	Qualitative methods: narrative interviews
<i>Methods of data analysis</i>	Qualitative methods: thematic analysis	Qualitative methods: thematic analysis
<i>Number of cases</i>	Thirteen	Fifteen
<i>Context</i>	Single organizational site – social enterprise, involved in alternative food initiatives	Several organizational sites – social enterprise models, involved in alternative food initiatives

Informants were selected to be organizational members at various levels/roles (a multiple perspective approach) and from diverse organizations in the alternative food system in order to maximize nuances and variations with respect to motivation and well-being narratives, and to provide a richer database for analysis. Thus, the selection of respondents was purposeful (Lincoln & Guba 1985). Data were collected through narrative interviewing technique with an in-depth, semi-structured interview design. Participants were chosen from purposefully selected organizations based in Glasgow, UK. Scotland was selected as the broader context due to its long history of social enterprise development and Glasgow as a city with a history of activism and citizenship initiatives as a response to the grand challenges it faced. The selection of sites was based on the website of the Glasgow social enterprise network (GSEN) and after an initial visit. The interviews were about 90 minutes long, with some taking about 100 to 150 minutes. I obtained an informed consent from the informants to participate in the study and have pseudonimized the identity of participants.

Multiple methods of data collection were used. For the collective case study, the methods of gathering qualitative accounts were triangulated to include interviews, observation and documents. For the multiple case narrative study, narrative interviews were

conducted. The methods of collecting accounts are shown in Table 4.

The case study approach was triangulated with narrative data collection and analysis, which is aimed to understand the world of the informant from an insider's perspective – the view of the informant (emic). Narrative analysis of data involves selecting 'units of meaning' from the data, by carefully reading through interview transcripts, and assigning them to categories (Shkedi 2005, p. 79). The present study utilized a thematic analysis, which involved segmenting the text into meaningful components: words or blocks of text. The text was reduced to specific key words that help identify patterns and make comparisons.

The data analysis was an iterative process, with a holistic approach involving carefully rereading the data several times, in order for the researcher to become familiarized with the data and notice patterns (Shkedi 2005). The segments of data related to the same phenomenon were grouped into 'in-vivo' categories, as they were taken from the natural language of the participants (Strauss & Corbin 1990). The categories were then classified into constructs that were taken from the field under study. The categorization involved adapting the concepts based on the data.

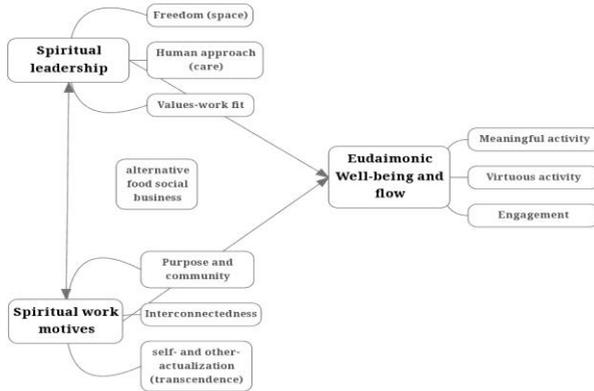
Table 4 Methods of gathering accounts

<i>For both collective case study and multiple case narratives</i>	
<b>Methods of gathering accounts</b>	<b>Prompts/instructions</b>
Semi-structured interviews	<p>Could you please tell me why and how did you arrive at choosing to do this work?</p> <p>Could you please reflect on your motives throughout your work experience?</p> <p>Could you please describe how you feel with respect to your job and any notable experiences you have had?</p> <p>Could you please describe how you see yourself, your role and your involvement with respect to your job?</p> <p>Could you please narrate how you experience your work?</p> <p>Could you please describe how you see the significance of the work you are doing here? And when compared to past experience, if any?</p>
Follow-up questions (if not already expressed in previous answers):	<p>Could you please tell me if you consider yourself spiritual and if so, how do you understand spirituality?</p> <p>Could you please tell me if you consider the effects of your work on others and if so, in what ways, through what practices?</p> <p>Could you please tell me what is the effect of this work on your well-being?</p>
Closing question:	<p>Is there anything you would like to talk about that you feel is important but I have not asked?</p>
<i>For collective case study only</i>	
Observation	<p><i>Non-participant observation</i>: non-verbal communication, behavior, general work atmosphere; and <i>Participatory observation</i>: attending events, workshops. Observed behaviors, processes, communication style, verbal and non-verbal exchanges, consistency with the stated social mission in interactions with the public.</p>
Documents	<p>Driver statement (mission and vision statement of the organization, including the organization's ethos)</p>

This research is based on twenty eight interviews, thirteen with individuals in one organization, and fifteen with individuals in several similar organizations. The participants are of different gender, age and ethnic background. The age of the participants ranges between twenty five and sixty five old. Of the total participants, sixteen are female and eleven male. With respect to ethnic background, most of the participants were Scottish and English, with some of the interviewees having Irish, Welsh, Belgian, Pakistani, Algerian, and Colombian origin. Participants' position within the organizations varied, the roles were mostly based on division on responsibilities and each participant had a type of leading role over their own work.

The collective case study was conducted with thirteen individuals in a single site which is a social enterprise serving seasonal and organic food that organizes community activities and provides space for community events. The multiple case narratives study was conducted with fifteen individuals in social businesses, including not for profit social enterprises, cooperatives, and charities combined with social enterprise model, that are also involved in food and community initiatives. The themes that emerged across both studies are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 Main themes



### III. Key findings

The key findings from this research are as follows:

- Individuals involved in alternative food social businesses are *pro-socially motivated* to contribute to the community, to others, beyond themselves, through offering nourishing and environmentally sustainable food, as well as a space for social cohesion.
- Finances are not the primary motivation for getting involved in these initiatives, rather making a contribution to social and environmental goals. This is not to say that material outcomes are disregarded, or that there is a dichotomy of either-or approach, rather that financial aspects are not as strong a motivation as

spiritual motives for doing work that is about sustainable food in social businesses.

- Participants in this study manifested considerations that are pro-self and pro-social. This provides support for the relational, reciprocal, collaborative side of human nature, expressed by the positive psychology scholarship and provided evidence for humans being motivated by considerations that go beyond self. This is the *transcendental* level in human motivation that is not about pure self-interest but about an innate desire for helping others.
- The dynamics between giving to self and others transitions between *pro-self* and *pro-social considerations* as well as *sensing versus doing*. Thus, there can be four states, pro-self – sensing, which is about *inner consciousness*, being in tune with the self, knowing own purpose, as essential for spiritual well-being. Pro-self – doing is about *self-actualization* and manifesting own potentials, or performing to own purpose and capacity. Pro-social – sensing is about being spiritually present for others, *empathizing*, listening, caring, understanding, not judging. Pro-social – doing is about *service*, helping others actualize, co-create.
- Participants in this study expressed work practices and behaviors that are indicative of a *spiritual leadership* approach, most notably, a cooperative approach to

working, as well as self-leading, caring, and attentive work practices.

- Having a fit between own values and the organization's ethos, as well as being able to bring the whole person at work showed to be very important among these participants.
- Participants in these initiatives experience *eudaimonic well-being* that stems from contributing to the well-being of others by incorporating own values and integrating the self with the work, feeling part of the organization that provides beneficial products/services, with as little as possible impact on the environment.
- The most positively affected type of well-being for individuals is the *psychological well-being* in terms of being well by doing well for others, resulting in engaging *flow* experiences.
- The most negatively affected well-being aspect for individuals is physical well-being in terms of fatigue and exhaustion. However, having good psychological well-being showed to be a supportive aspect for recovery, by being able to address own well-being when needed and having the space to do that.
- With respect to well-being outcomes and coping strategies, *spaces* in metaphorical and physical sense provide coping strategies, by having the freedom to just be oneself and by having a safe space to share and work with others.

- With respect to levels of (stakeholder) well-being, these individuals take a *multi-stakeholder approach*, including a consideration for intra-organizational individual and group well-being, organizational well-being, customer well-being, producer-supplier well-being, local community well-being, general public well-being, societal well-being, environmental well-being, and animal well-being.
- With respect how well-being is achieved, there are intra-organizational, organizational and extra-organizational orientations. For within the organization, workforce well-being is achieved through *nice working atmosphere* (safe, welcoming, non-judgmental space), good and caring co-worker relations, equality, bringing the whole personality at work, having ownership and autonomy over the work and knowing that the *organization's purpose is worthwhile*. Financial viability is important in order to sustain the organization's activities and social purpose, thus, it is important to be *self-sufficient* and independent.
- In terms of external stakeholders, participants expressed care for the well-being of humans/customers by providing *good food* and a welcoming, *safe space* for the communities; by *supporting local livelihoods* and ethical producers by *collaborating* with organic, local and small organizations and producers; well-being for society by changing social relations and

improving *human health* through food and spaces; well-being for the *environment* through the use of local, organic, seasonal produce; and well-being for *animals* by excluding animal products.

- Overall, within the realm of individuals working in social businesses involved in alternative food initiatives, the prevailing motives and practices are of *spiritual* nature. These relate to organizational structure and processes, as well as the core activity of the organization. The *organization's purpose* is equally important as the *organization's structure* or model. This results in well-being experiences that provide meaning, fulfillment and engagement.

These findings supplement the existing knowledge in the area of workplace spirituality, leadership and well-being by providing insights on issues that have been less explored so far and called for in the literature (e.g., Guillén et al. 2015, Csikszentmihalyi 1999, Fry 2003). The research results provide evidence of spiritual motives and well-being within a certain organizational context. The added value of this research consists of uncovering insights into the complex issue on workplace well-being, as informed by the workplace spirituality scholarship and as manifested in the contemporary work context, within the increasingly relevant alternative food social businesses.

The findings should be of interest to scholars of organizational behavior, management, spirituality and religion (MSR), social business, business ethics, leadership and positive psychology. The results of this study should be of value to business practitioners, policy makers, educators, consultants who are interested in creating humane workspaces and flourishing individuals and organizations. Considering that the findings relate to specific, purposeful exploratory study in specific organizational, future studies could explore these phenomena further in different organizational and geographical contexts. This research presents valuable insights based on the workplace experiences of the individuals included in this study and offers an optimistic perspective to work relations. It shows that care and compassion have a place in business and in the cases of social enterprises that are focused on sustainable food, benevolence prevails among individuals who work there. This is important if we are to humanize the work-life experiences in order to flourish as individuals and societies.

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## V. List of publications

### *Publications related to the topic*

Neulinger, A., Bársony, F., Gjorevska, N., Lazányi, O., Pataki, G., Takács, S., & Török, A. (2020): Engagement and subjective well-being in alternative food networks: the case of Hungary. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12566>

Gjorevska, N. (2019): Workplace Spirituality in Social Entrepreneurship: Motivation for Serving the Common Good. In: Bouckaert L., van den Heuvel S. (eds) *Servant Leadership, Social Entrepreneurship and the Will to Serve* (pp. 187-209). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-29936-1\\_10](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-29936-1_10)

Takács, S., Gjorevska, N., & Meretei, B. (2018): Management and Leadership Development Needs – The Case of Hungary. In Purg, D., Lalić, A. B., & Pope, J. A. (Eds.) *Business and Society: Making Management Education Relevant for the 21st Century*, Springer. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78855-5>

Gjorevska, N., & Takács, S. (2016, June): Making organizations more meaningful: Linking spirituality, leadership and flow theory in the workplace. In *An Enterprise Odyssey. International Conference Proceedings* (p. 113). University of Zagreb, Faculty of Economics and Business.

Gjorevska, N. (2015). *Strategies for enforcing motivation of employees in the enterprise*, Skopje: Gjorevska, Natasha.

### ***Conference presentations related to the topic***

*Conference:* 11th International Social Innovation Research Conference ISIRC 2019 Glasgow

*Organizer:* Glasgow Caledonian University, United Kingdom

*Location:* Glasgow, United Kingdom

*Date:* September 2-4, 2019

*Presentation title:* The Role of Organizations Offering Plant-Based Solutions: A Pathway to Health and Well-Being

*Conference:* 7<sup>th</sup> EMES International Research Conference on Social Enterprise

*Organizer:* Sheffield Hallam University, United Kingdom

*Location:* Sheffield, United Kingdom

*Date:* June 24-27, 2019

*Presentation title:* Conceptualizing the ‘Social’ in Social Entrepreneurship from a Spiritual Perspective

*Conference:* the 2018 Annual SPES conference on Servant leadership and social entrepreneurship

*Organizers:* European SPES Institute, the Institute of Leadership and Social Ethics (ILSE), the Damien Center Leuven

*Location:* Leuven, Belgium

*Date:* May 24-26, 2018

*Presentation title:* Workplace spirituality in social entrepreneurship: Motivation for serving others

*Conference:* 8th International Conference: “An Enterprise Odyssey: Saving the Sinking Ship through Human Capital”

*Organizer:* Faculty of Economics & Business, University of Zagreb

*Location:* Zagreb, Croatia

*Date:* June 8-11, 2016

*Presentation title:* Making Organizations More Meaningful: Linking Spirituality, Leadership and Flow Theory in The Workplace