

Spirituality and Religion in Management: Pathways, Motivations, and Economic Implications

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Abstract

This research examines the integration of spirituality and religion into management, with a particular focus on their implications for organizational performance, labor productivity, and institutional trust. Academic research, corporate initiatives, and leadership models have been the primary pathways driving this transformation. The integration gained prominence in the late 20th century, aligning with a human-centered approach that enhances employee well-being while contributing to organizational efficiency. The Academy of Management (AOM), founded in 1936, has played a pivotal role in advancing these debates through its interdisciplinary scholarship and global influence. Methodologically, data from Science Direct and JSTOR provide a comprehensive view of the prevalence and trajectory of spirituality and religion within AOM divisions. The findings underscore the growing importance of spirituality and religion in shaping ethical, inclusive, and human-centered management practices. Beyond individual well-being, the analysis highlights their economic relevance in strengthening organizational outcomes, labor engagement, and sustainable institutional development.

Keywords: Spirituality, Management, Labor Productivity, Organizational Performance, Academy of Management, Institutional Economics

Background

This paper examines the integration of spirituality and religion into management, analyzing the pathways through which this incorporation has taken place, the central role of academic inquiry, and the diverse motivations underlying the transformation. It also considers the temporal dynamics of this integration, its relationship with leadership models, and the economic and organizational reasons that have fueled its rise.

Integration of Spirituality into Management

The incorporation of spirituality into management has unfolded through multiple channels, each shaped by distinct motivations. Academic research and publications were among the earliest vehicles, with scholars examining its impact on workplace behavior, leadership practices, and organizational culture—laying a foundation for its acceptance in mainstream discourse. In parallel, corporate initiatives began to apply spiritual principles such as meditation and mindfulness to enhance worker well-being and productivity (McCormick, 1994). Leadership frameworks that emphasized values, ethics, and purpose further reinforced this process, positioning spirituality as a guiding philosophy for organizational decision-making and human capital management.

Timing of Spirituality's Introduction

The rise of spirituality in management became most visible in the late twentieth century, coinciding with broader shifts in organizational theory. The Human Relations Movement provided fertile ground, as it emphasized employee well-being, motivation, and holistic approaches to productivity (Pandey & Gupta, 2008). Building on this momentum, the 1980s and 1990s witnessed influential contributions from scholars such as Peter Senge and David Cooperrider, who introduced concepts like *spiritual intelligence* and *appreciative inquiry*. These ideas advanced the discussion of spirituality from a peripheral concern to a recognized component of organizational and management theory (Neal, 1997).

Motivations for Integration

The infusion of spirituality into management reflects a fundamental shift toward human-centered organizational practices. Rather than viewing employees solely as economic inputs, spirituality emphasizes their broader well-being and intrinsic needs (Schmidt-Wilk et al., 2000). Within the workplace, spiritual values are associated with greater engagement, higher job satisfaction, and improved productivity—each of which strengthens the organization's overall efficiency by instilling a sense of purpose and meaning in work.

At the leadership level, spirituality reinforces ethical and values-based decision-making, meeting the growing demand for transparent and responsible business practices. In an era of globalization and workforce diversity, spirituality also serves as a unifying framework that transcends cultural and religious boundaries, promoting inclusivity and cohesion within organizations (Zsolnai, 2004). Together, these dimensions illustrate how spirituality functions not only as a moral or cultural resource but also as a driver of economic performance and institutional trust.

History and Position of the Academy of Management (AOM)

Founded in 1936, the Academy of Management (AOM) has been a central institution in shaping management and organizational studies. Initially focused on consolidating management as an academic field, the Academy grew significantly during the 1960s and 1970s, reflecting the diversification of management thought and the rising importance of interdisciplinary approaches. Over time, AOM has established itself as a premier platform for advancing scholarship through its annual meetings, influential journals, and international outreach initiatives. These activities have positioned the Academy as a hub for knowledge exchange, best practices, and the professionalization of management research (AOM, 2023).

Fields within AOM and Membership

The breadth of AOM's divisions highlights the interdisciplinary nature of management studies. As of 2021, divisions such as Organizational Behavior, Strategic Management, and Human Resources accounted for the largest memberships, reflecting their enduring relevance. At the same time, specialized areas—such as Management, Spirituality, and Religion (MSR)—demonstrate the Academy's openness to emerging research domains that link organizational outcomes with ethical, cultural, and institutional concerns. This diversity underlines AOM's role in fostering dialogue across subfields and advancing holistic understandings of management that integrate economic, social, and human dimensions.

Methodology

The data collection process relied on Science Direct and JSTOR databases between October 23 and December 9, 2021. A keyword strategy combining “spirituality,” “religion,” and the names of specific AOM divisions was employed to retrieve year-wise publication counts. The collected data was systematically organized into tables and graphs to capture publication trends across divisions, thereby offering a comprehensive view of how spirituality and religion have entered management scholarship. This methodological approach provided both a temporal perspective and a comparative view of the prevalence of spirituality within the Academy of Management’s subfields.

Pathways, Timing, and Motivations for Incorporation of Spirituality into Management

Pathways of Incorporation

The integration of spirituality into management has occurred through multiple avenues. Academic research was the most prominent driver, with scholars exploring its effects on workplace behavior, leadership dynamics, and organizational culture, thereby establishing a foundation for its inclusion in management theory (Chen & Sheng, 2013; Zsolnai, 2011). Alongside scholarship, corporate initiatives also played a significant role, as organizations experimented with mindfulness and meditation programs to enhance employee development and performance (Sachdeva, 2019). Moreover, leadership models that emphasized values, ethics, and purpose provided a conceptual bridge, advocating more enlightened and ethically grounded management philosophies (Neal & Biberman, 2003).

Timing of Introduction

The late twentieth century marked the ascendancy of spirituality in management discourse, shaped heavily by the Human Relations Movement, which prioritized employee well-being and holistic approaches to productivity (Nimmi et al., 2022). During this period, spirituality was increasingly recognized as a legitimate component of organizational life and economic performance. In the 1980s and 1990s, scholars such as Peter Senge and David Cooperrider further advanced the field by introducing frameworks like *spiritual intelligence* and *appreciative inquiry*, which linked spirituality to organizational learning, innovation, and adaptability (Barnett et al., 2000).

Underlying Motivations

At the core of this integration lies a shift toward a human-centered model of economic organization. Spirituality emphasizes the well-being and fulfillment of employees, acknowledging them not merely as labor inputs but as individuals with intrinsic spiritual needs (Rocha & Pinheiro, 2021). Within this framework, spirituality is seen as a catalyst for engagement, job satisfaction, and productivity (Sharma, 2019), strengthening motivation and commitment at the workplace.

In addition, spirituality aligns with the growing global demand for ethical and values-based leadership, where compassion, empathy, and integrity become central to sustainable organizational success (Geh & Tan, 2009). Beyond ethics, spirituality fosters inclusivity by

transcending cultural and religious boundaries, serving as a unifying force within increasingly diverse organizations (Dean & Fornaciari, 2007).

Synthesis

Taken together, the incorporation of spirituality into management can be understood as the outcome of academic inquiry, corporate experimentation, and values-oriented leadership models. Its emergence in the late twentieth century reflected both humanistic and economic motivations: enhancing well-being and engagement, strengthening organizational cohesion, and promoting ethical leadership practices. This dual emphasis—on individual fulfillment and organizational efficiency—explains why spirituality has become a sustained and growing theme in management scholarship.

History, Goals, and Position of the Academy of Management (AOM) in the Management Discipline

The Academy of Management (AOM), headquartered in Valhalla, New York, is an international organization with members worldwide. Since its founding in 1936, the Academy has played a pivotal role in advancing management and organizational studies, serving as one of the most influential scholarly associations in the field (AOM, 2023).

Early Foundations and Growth

During its formative years in the late 1930s through the 1950s, the Academy—originally known as the *Academy of Management and Decision Sciences*—emerged in response to the growing recognition of management as an academic and professional discipline (Tang, 2010). Its initial focus was on promoting management studies through research and publication, providing a structured platform for scholarly exchange.

The 1960s and 1970s marked a period of significant growth. Reflecting the increasing diversity of management scholarship, the AOM broadened its scope by creating specialized divisions and interest groups. This diversification reflected the expansion of management into multiple subfields such as strategy, organizational behavior, and human resources, as well as emerging areas that bridged economics, sociology, and ethics (Bouckaert & Zsolnai, 2012).

Institutional Innovations and Influence

A hallmark development in the Academy's history has been the establishment of annual meetings and conferences, which quickly became central venues for presenting research, fostering scholarly dialogue, and facilitating collaboration among academics and practitioners (Petrosko & Alagaraja, 2017). These gatherings remain pivotal events in the management field, shaping intellectual discourse and disseminating cutting-edge knowledge (Mohammadi et al., 2014).

In addition, the launch of influential academic journals—such as the *Academy of Management Journal* and the *Academy of Management Review*—cemented AOM's role as a leader in knowledge creation and dissemination. These journals continue to serve as premier outlets for research findings, maintaining global reputations for excellence and impact.

Globalization and Interdisciplinarity

By the late twentieth century, the AOM increasingly embraced its international character, welcoming members from across the globe and promoting cross-border collaboration. This expansion positioned the Academy as a catalyst for the globalization of management knowledge (Delbecq, 2009). Its scope also became highly interdisciplinary, recognizing that management intersects with psychology, sociology, economics, and ethics. This interdisciplinary ethos enriched the field, enabling more holistic approaches to understanding organizations and leadership (Tackney et al., 2017).

Ethical and Social Responsibility Emphasis

As societal values evolved, the Academy began to foreground ethics and social responsibility as critical components of management scholarship. This emphasis reflected growing attention to corporate governance, sustainability, and responsible leadership in both academic and practitioner communities (Zsolnai, 2011).

Contemporary Role

Today, the Academy of Management is a thriving global hub for advancing management scholarship. Its annual meetings, esteemed publications, diversified divisions, and recognition of outstanding contributions through awards and honors underscore its ongoing influence. It continues to shape management as a discipline by fostering scholarly innovation, promoting collaboration, and encouraging rigorous engagement with both established and emerging areas of research (Tischler et al., 2007).

The fields within AOM and the number of members as of 2021

The following table summarizes the diverse fields within AOM and the number of members in each.

Table 1: The fields within AOM and the number of members as of 2021

Cluster	Acronym	Division Keyword	Year	AOM Membership No. of Members

Macro	STR	Strategic Management	2021	5795
Meso	OMT	Organization and Management Theory	2021	4267
Macro	ENT	Entrepreneurship	2021	3724
Micro	HR	Human Resources	2021	3543
Macro	TIM	Technology and Innovation Management	2021	3438
Micro	RM	Research Methods	2021	2559
Macro	IM	International Management	2021	2337
Micro	ODC	Organization Development and Change	2021	2111
Macro	SIM	Social Issues in Management	2021	2051
Micro	GDO	Gender and Diversity in Organizations	2021	1802
Micro	MED	Management Education and Development	2021	1769
Meso	MOC	Managerial and Organizational Cognition	2021	1350
Micro	MC	Management Consulting	2021	1073
Micro	CAR	Careers	2021	992
Meso	HCM	Health Care Management	2021	892
Micro	OCIS	Organizational Communications and Information Systems	2021	866
Macro	ONE	Organizations and the Natural Environment	2021	852
Meso	PNP	Public and Nonprofit	2021	825
Micro	CM	Conflict Management	2021	825
Meso	CMS	Critical Management Studies	2021	799
Macro	SAP	Strategizing Activities and Practices	2021	742
Macro	OSCM	Operations and Supply Chain Management	2021	685
Micro	MSR	Management, Spirituality, and Religion	2021	630
Meso	MH	Management History	2021	407
Micro	NEU	Organizational Neuroscience	2021	273
Micro	OB	Organizational Behavior	2021	6507

Methodology Used for Analyses of Data

The study relied on **Science Direct** and **JSTOR** databases to analyze publication trends on spirituality and religion within the Academy of Management (AOM) divisions. The selection of data was guided by the official overview of AOM's interest groups and division categories. The

time frame covered was **1998 to 2021**, and the data encompassed a wide range of publication types, including research articles, review articles, encyclopedias, book chapters, case reports, discussions, editorials, mini-reviews, practice guidelines, short communications, and a residual category labeled “other.”

The overall aim was to construct a **comprehensive, year-wise picture** of the popularity of spirituality and religion across AOM divisions. The process followed these steps:

1. **Database Access:** Remote access to JSTOR and Science Direct was provided through the Indian Institute of Technology (Banaras Hindu University), India.
2. **Keyword Strategy:** For both databases, searches combined the term “*Spirituality*” with the name of an AOM division. The year-wise trend of publications under various categories was retrieved by selecting the relevant search options.
3. **Science Direct Data Extraction:** For Science Direct, each year between 1998 and 2021 was selected individually. The number of publications under each category was recorded and transferred to a Google spreadsheet, along with the date of access.
4. **JSTOR Data Extraction:** On JSTOR, the search was refined by entering identical start and end dates for a given year (e.g., 2005–2005). This procedure produced the number of publications under the specified division for each year. These results were also entered into the Google spreadsheet.
5. **Data Organization:** For each AOM division, graphs were created in Excel to illustrate year-wise publication trends across categories. These graphs were then compiled into the Google spreadsheet.
6. **Comprehensive Tables and Graphs:** To generate an overview, two consolidated tables and graphs were prepared for JSTOR and Science Direct separately. These summarized the year-wise total publications across all twenty-six AOM divisions. The graphs were copied into separate sheets within the same Google spreadsheet for consistency.
7. **Final Dataset:** The result was a structured dataset consisting of **twenty-six division-level tables and graph pairs** for each database, supplemented by aggregate tables and graphs. This offered a clear picture of both category-specific and overall trends.

The data collection period extended from **October 23 to December 9, 2021**. This systematic process provided a reliable foundation for analyzing how research on spirituality and religion has evolved within AOM divisions over the last two decades.

Data Collection on Religion

For the analysis of religion-related publications, only the total number of records was collected without further categorical distinctions. The data collection period spanned from October 23, 2021 to January 3, 2022. The following process was employed:

1. Database Access: Remote access was provided to the Science Direct database through the Indian Institute of Technology (Banaras Hindu University), India.
2. Keyword Strategy: Searches were conducted using the term “*Religion*” combined with the name of a specific AOM division.
3. Year-wise Retrieval: The search results displayed the annual totals of publications for each division. These were reviewed systematically for each year from 1998 to 2021.
4. Data Entry: The year-wise totals for all AOM divisions were entered into a Google spreadsheet for structured storage.
5. Visualization: Using the compiled dataset, a chart was prepared in Google Sheets to illustrate year-wise publication trends on religion across the various divisions.

Results from Various Databases in Chart format

Chart 1: Overall Chart in Science Direct

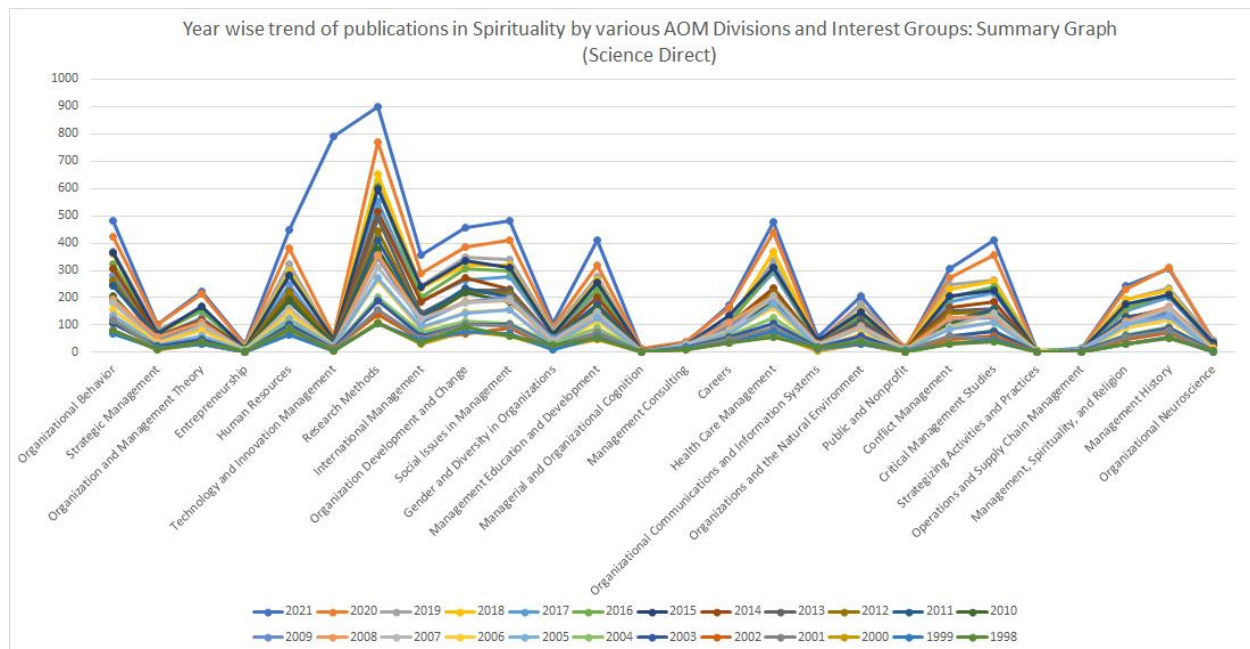
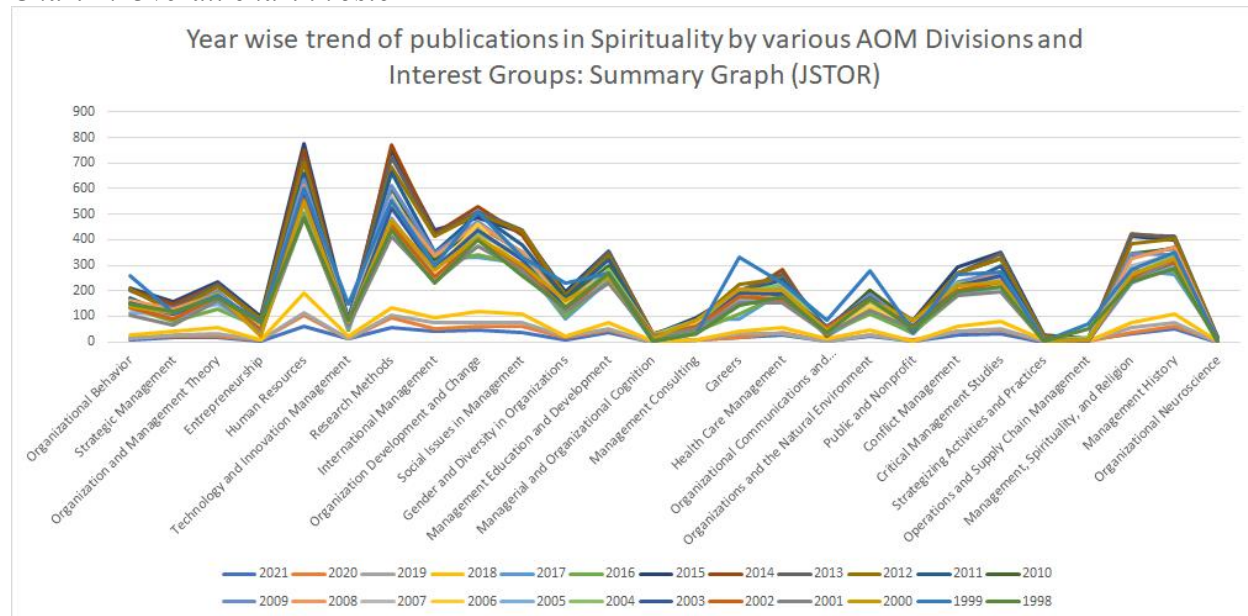


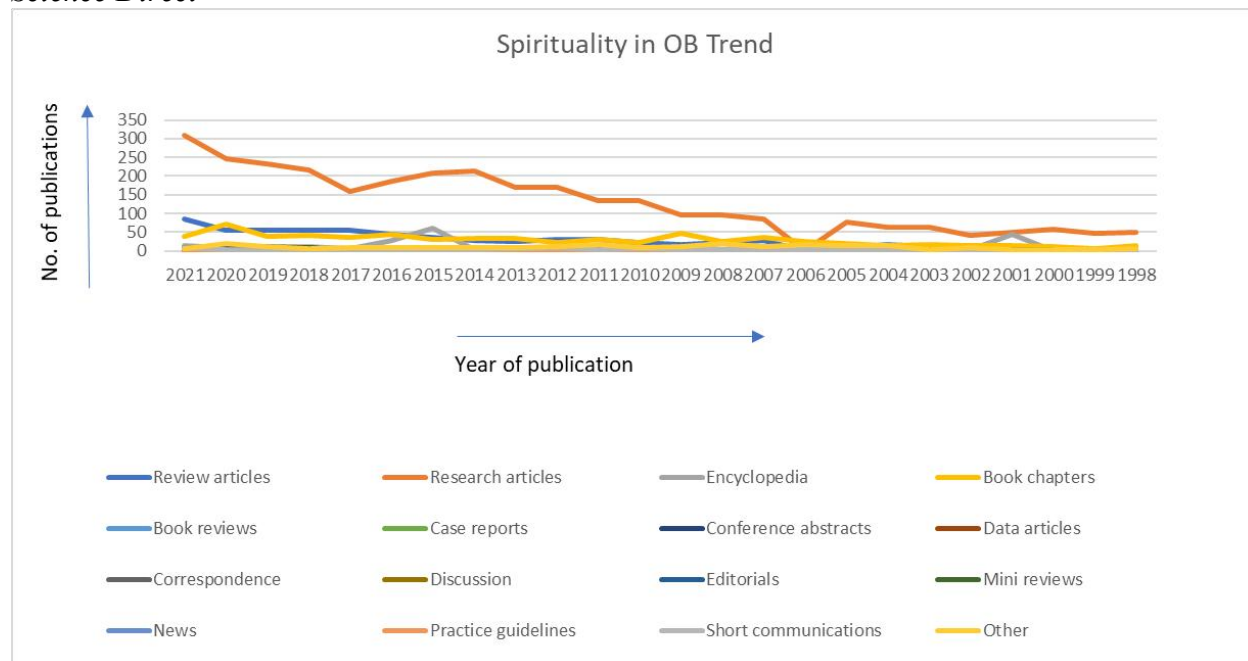
Chart 2: Overall chart in Jstor



Both graphs show a similar trend.

Spirituality in Organizational Behavior

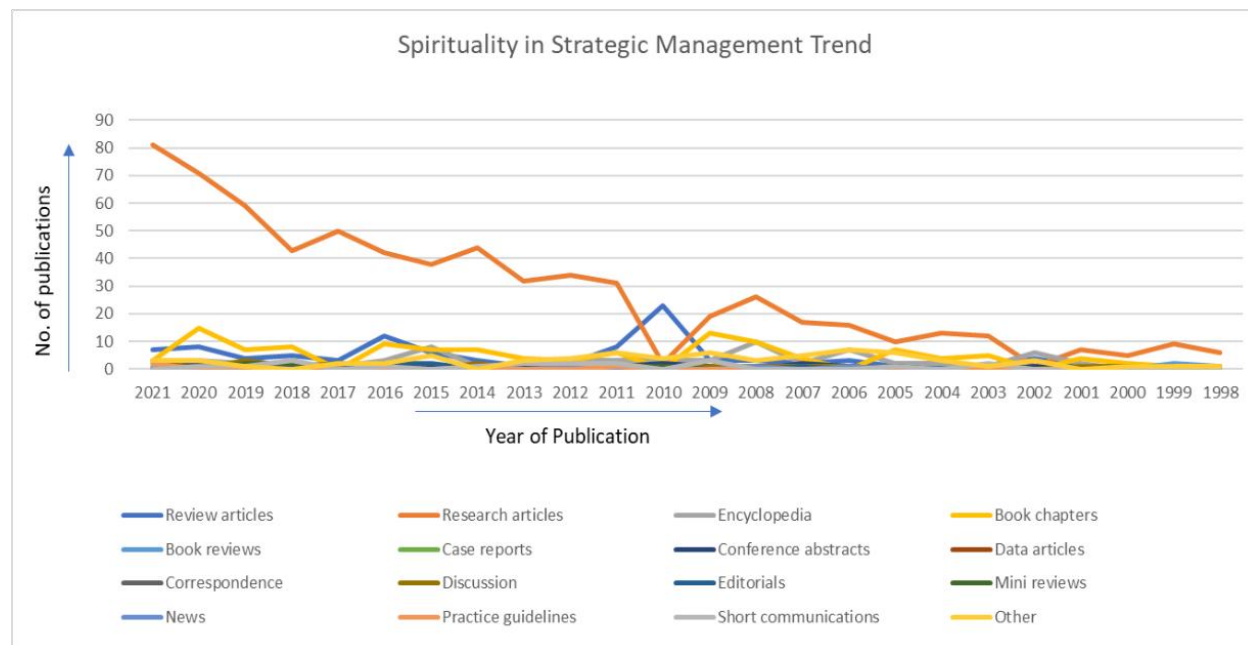
Science Direct



The trend is upward

Spirituality in Strategic Management

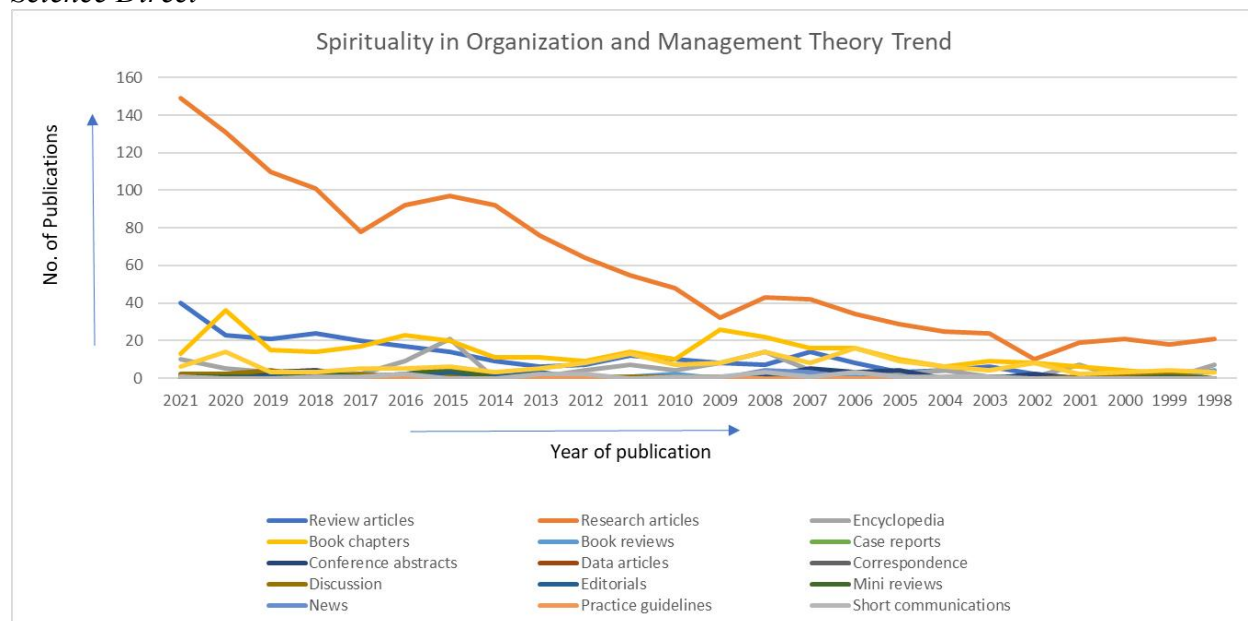
Science Direct



The trend is upward.

Spirituality in Organization and Management Theory

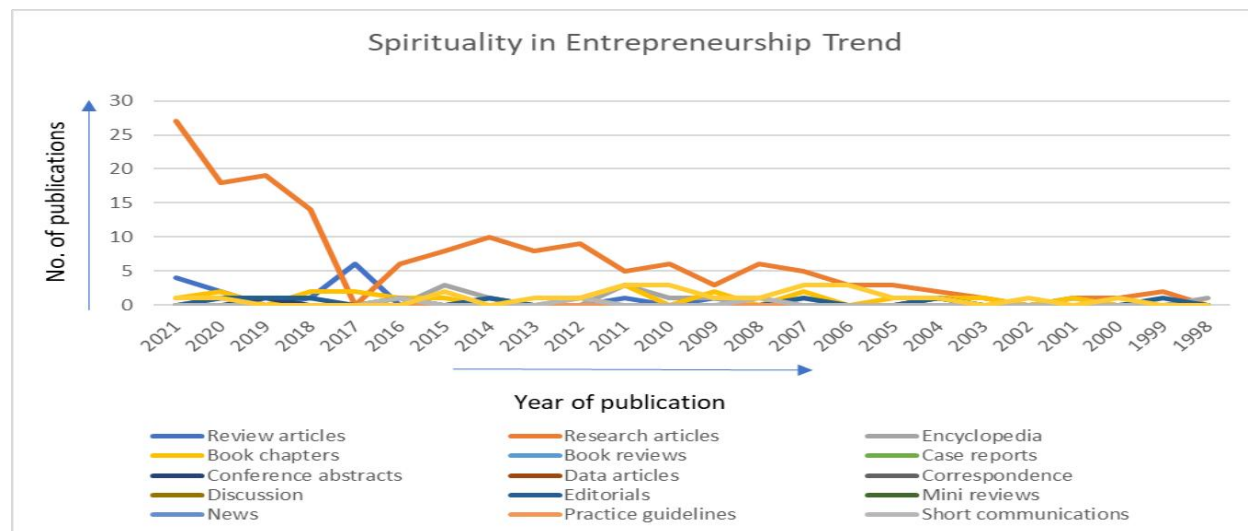
Science Direct



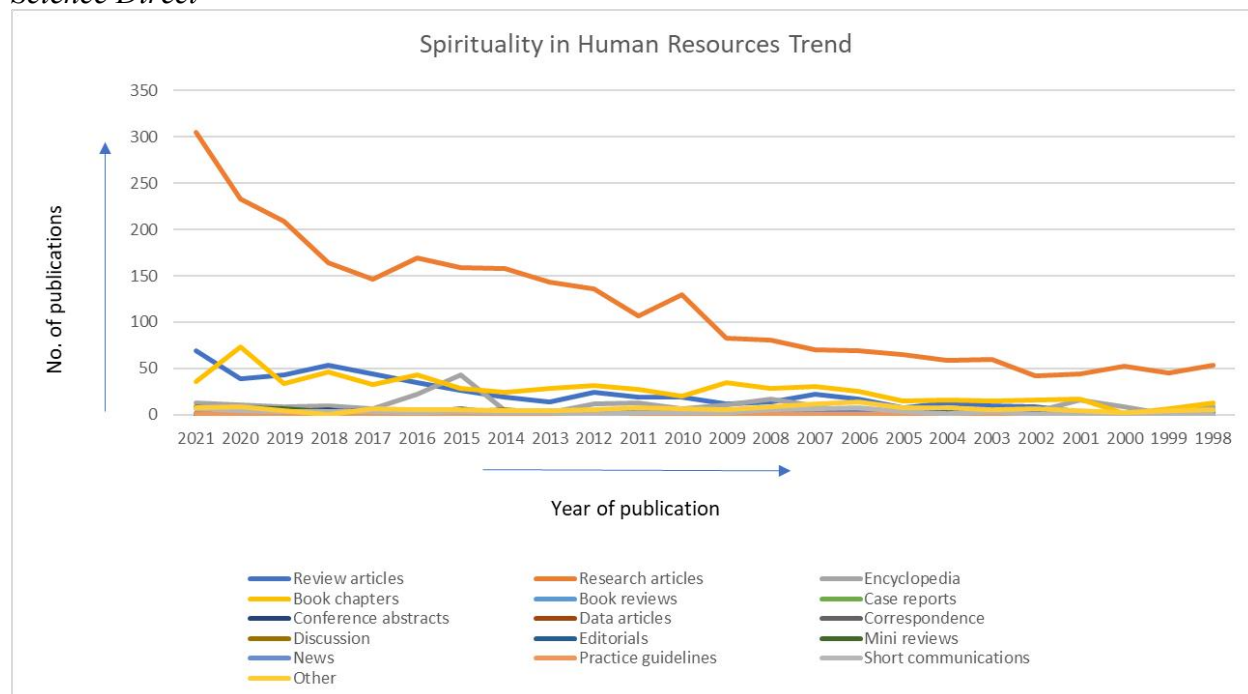
The trend is also upward.

Spirituality in Entrepreneurship

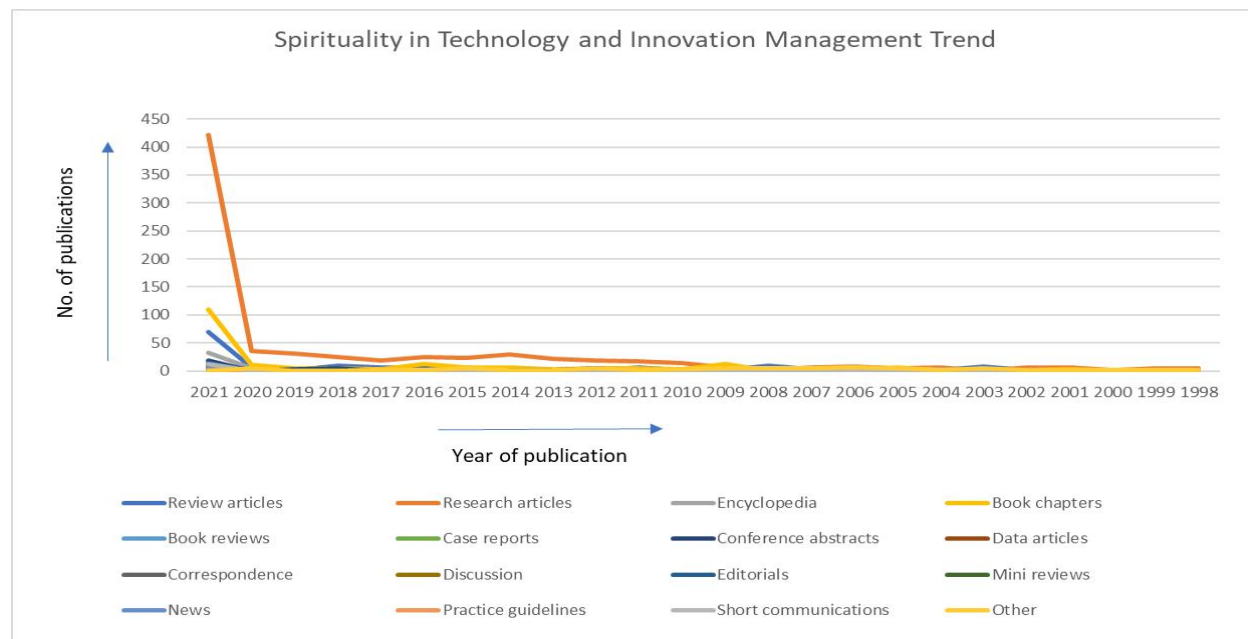
Science Direct



Trend is upward research articles
Spirituality in Human Resources
Science Direct



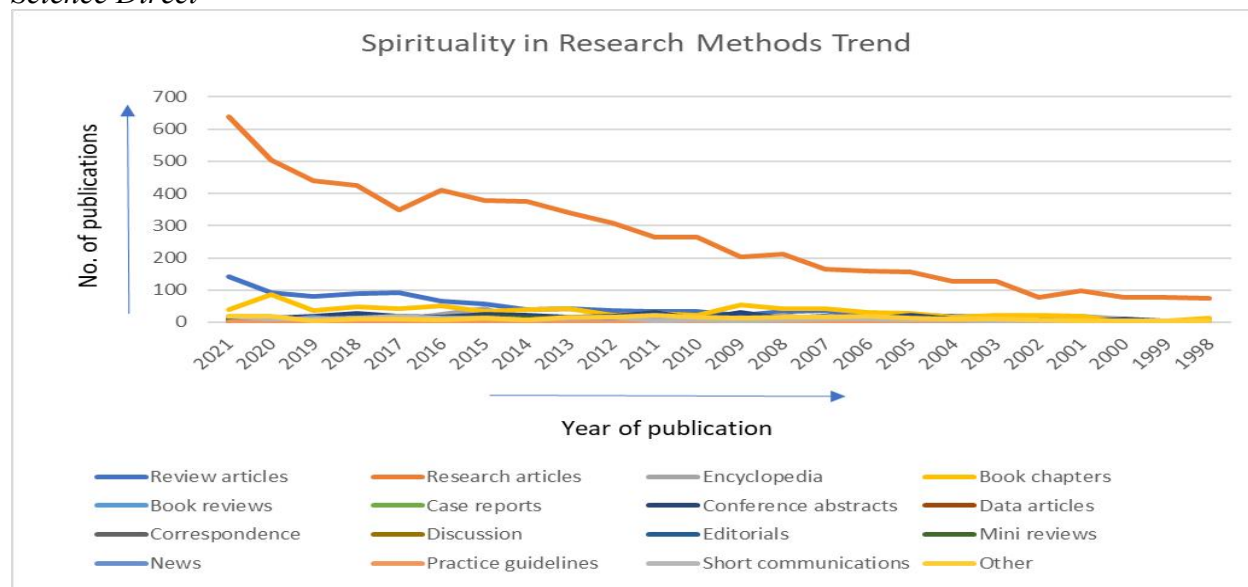
The trend is upward
Spirituality in Technology and Innovation Management
Science Direct



This is an interesting trend as only recently is rising.

Spirituality in Research Methods

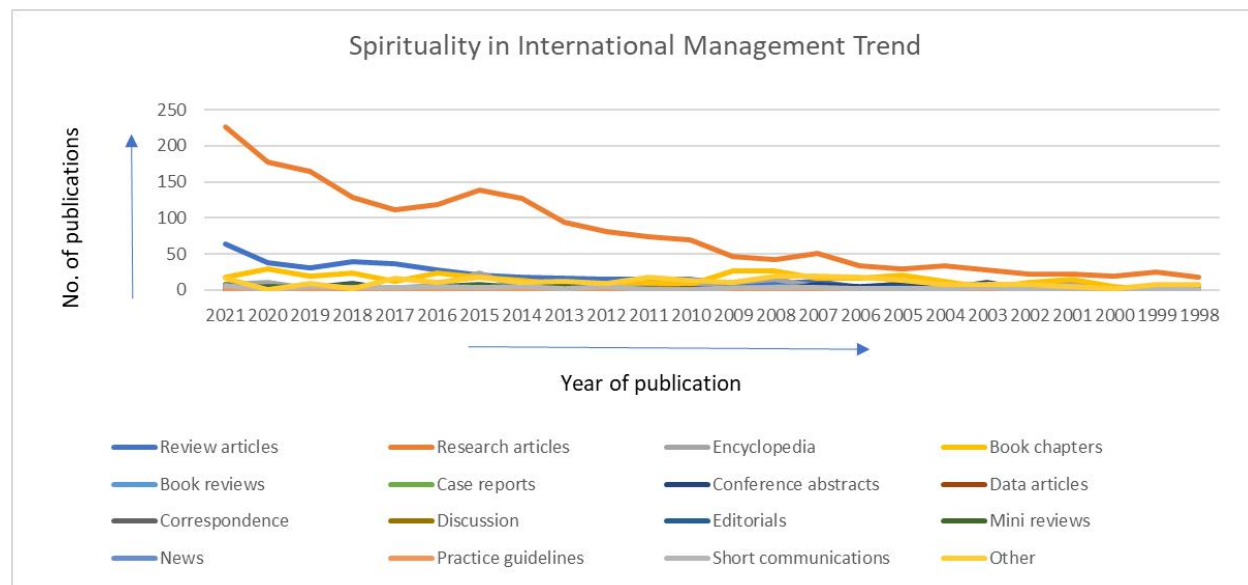
Science Direct



Interesting upward trend also in research

Spirituality in International Management

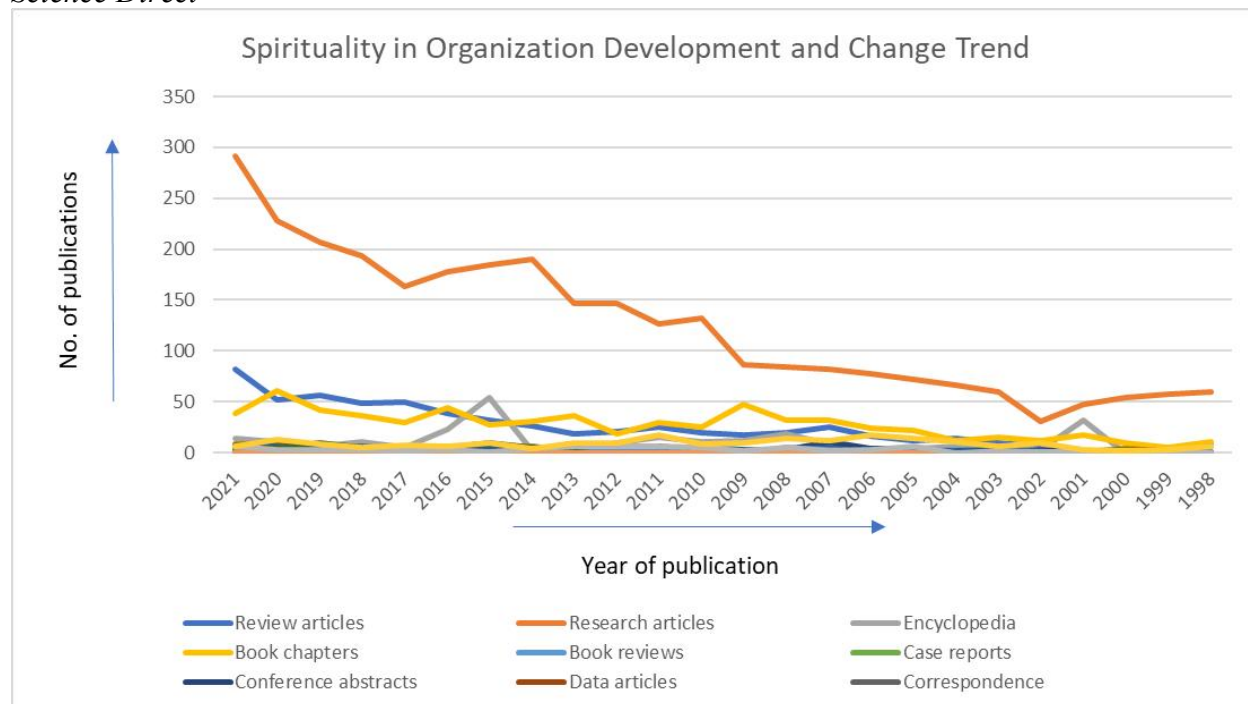
Science Direct



Also upward trend

Spirituality in Organization Development and Change

Science Direct



Especially research articles trend is upward

Spirituality in Social issues in Management

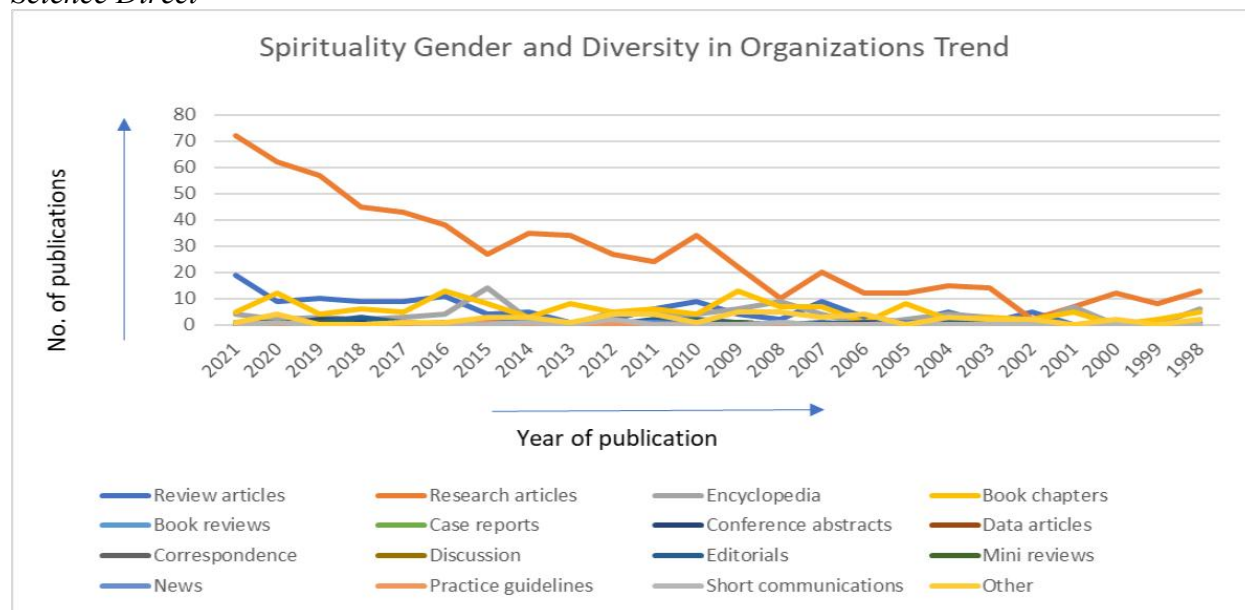
Science Direct



Also upward trend

Spirituality in Gender and Diversity in Organisations

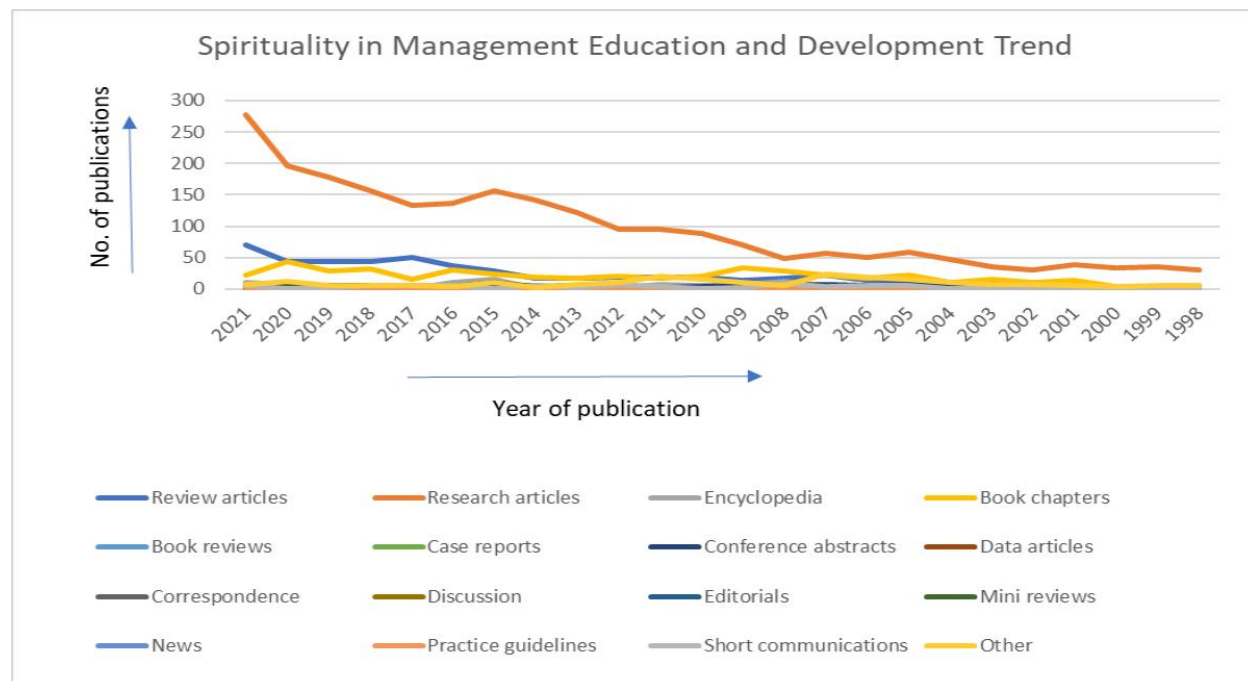
Science Direct



Also upward trend

Spirituality in Education and Development

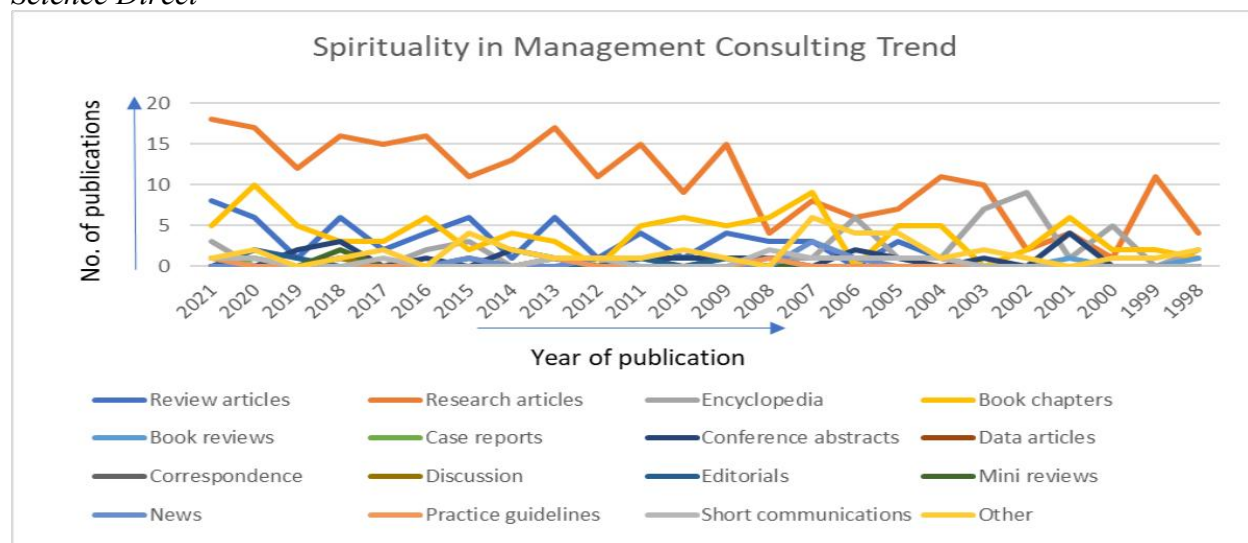
Science Direct



Also, upward trend

Spirituality in Management Consulting

Science Direct



Pattern in consultancy is a bit different

Spirituality in Managerial and Organizational Cognition

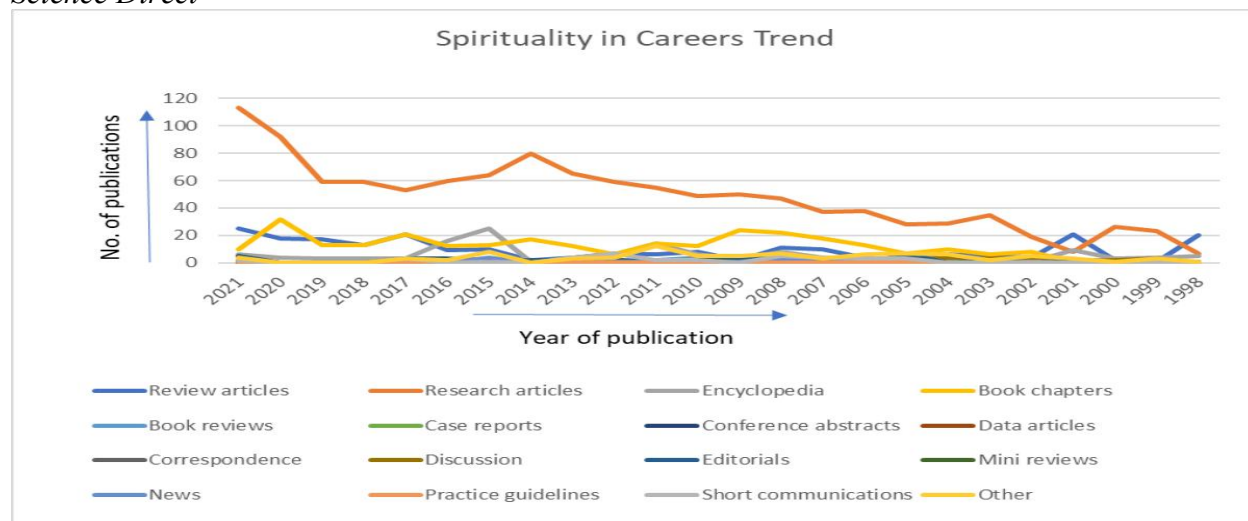
Science Direct



Pattern is a bit different.

Spirituality in Career

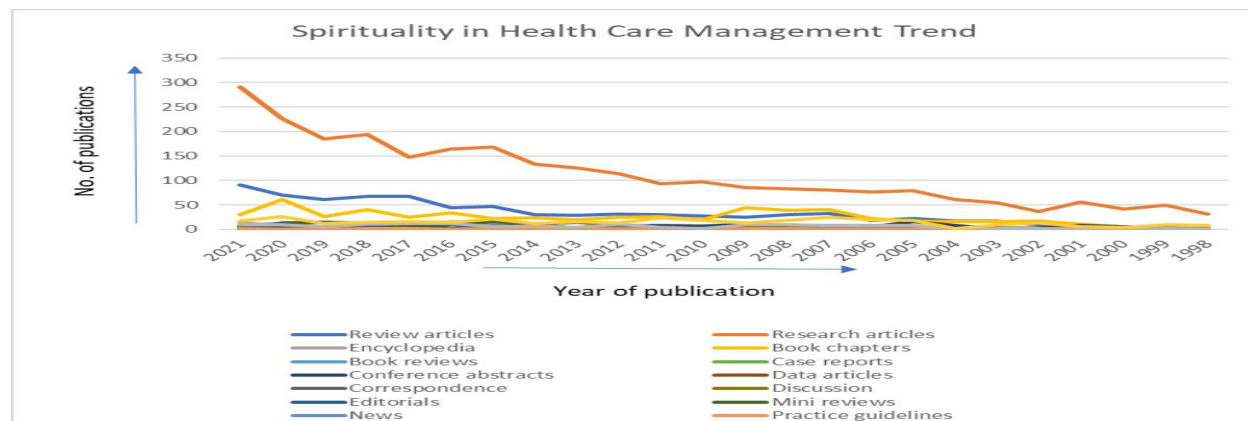
Science Direct



Upward trend too

Spirituality in Health Care Management

Science Direct



Also upward trend

Spirituality in Organizational Communications and Information Systems

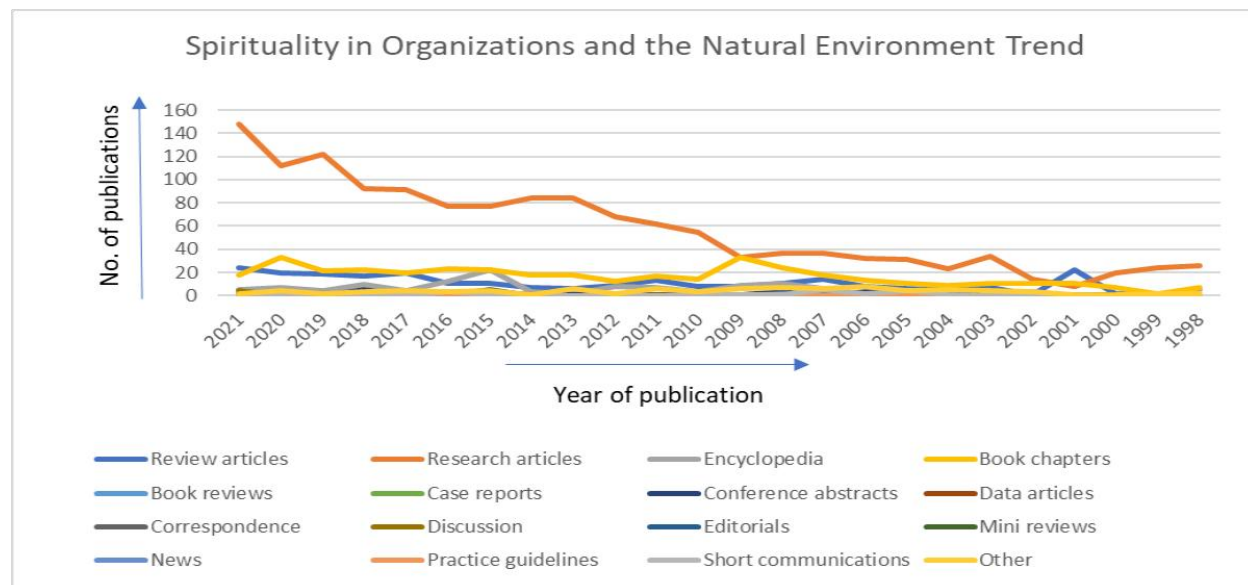
Science Direct



Pattern is a bit different but in recent years upward trend

Spirituality in Organizations and the Natural Environment

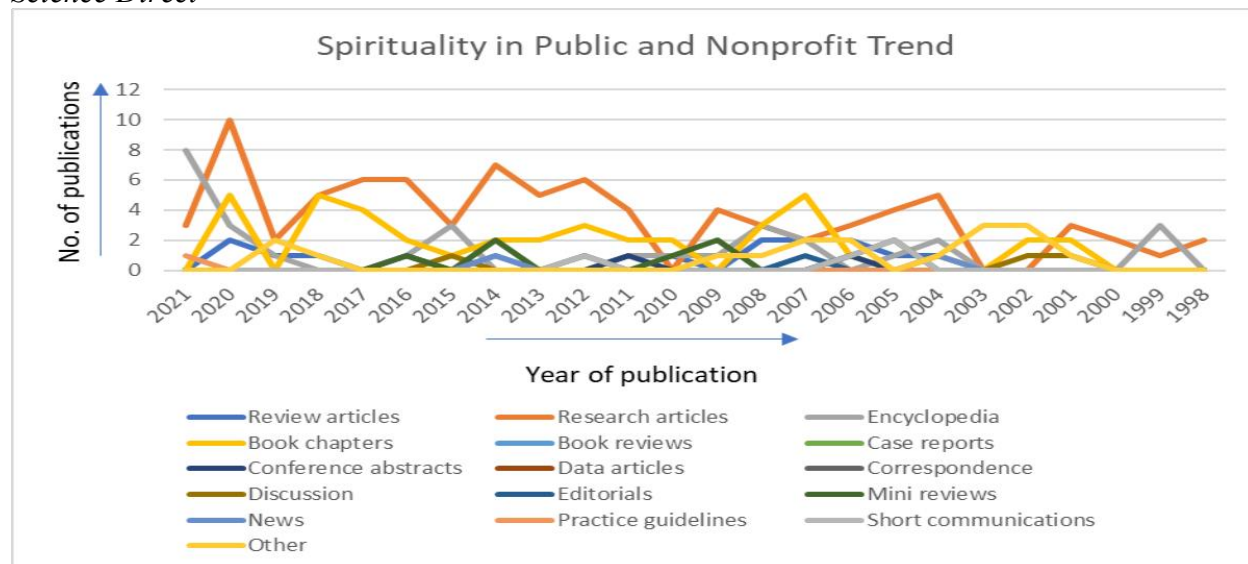
Science Direct



Upward trend research papers

Spirituality in Public and Nonprofit

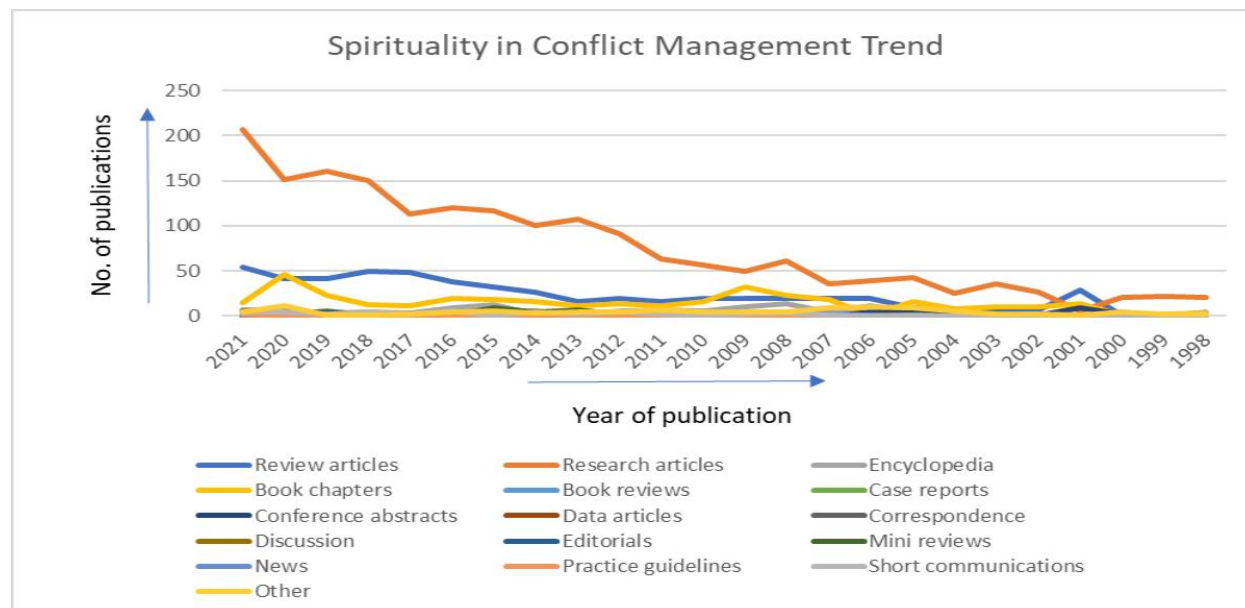
Science Direct



Pattern is atypical

Spirituality in Conflict Management

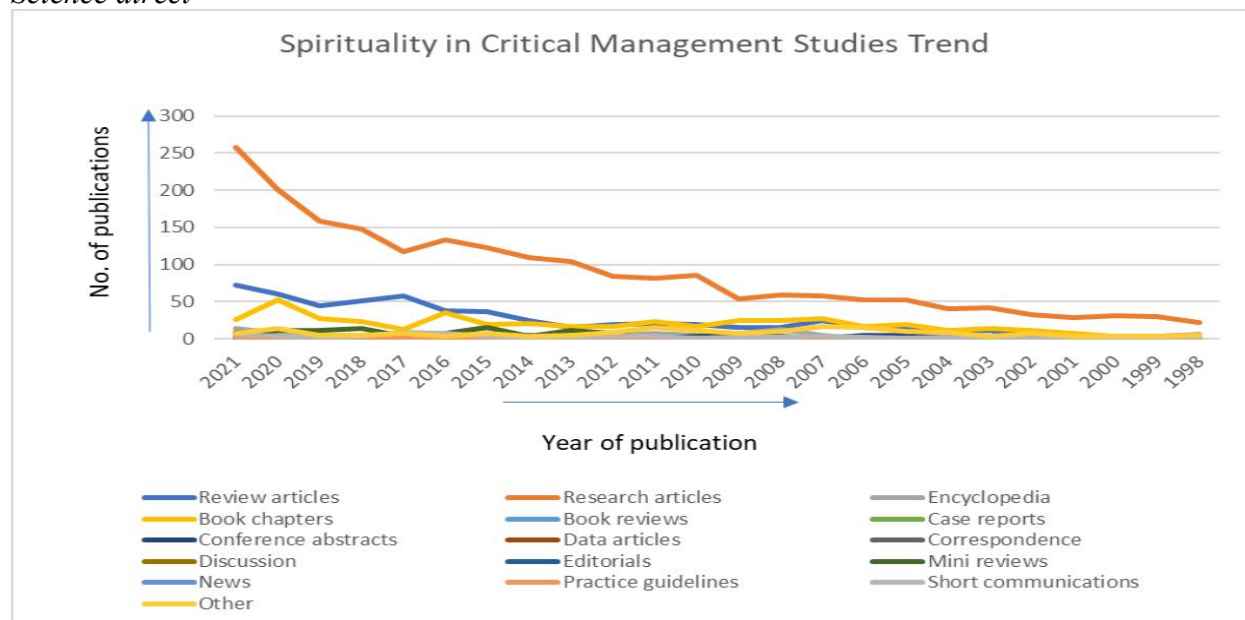
Science Direct



Trend is upward

Spirituality in Critical Management Studies

Science direct



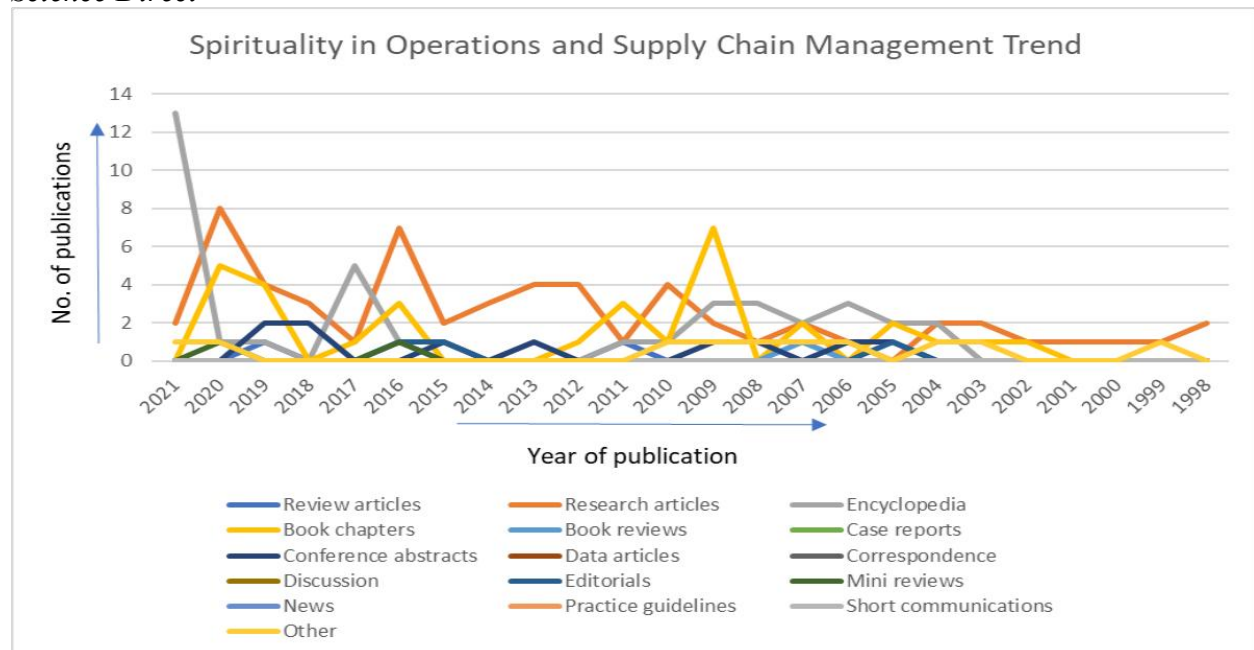
Upward trend

Spirituality in Strategizing Activities and Practices

Science direct



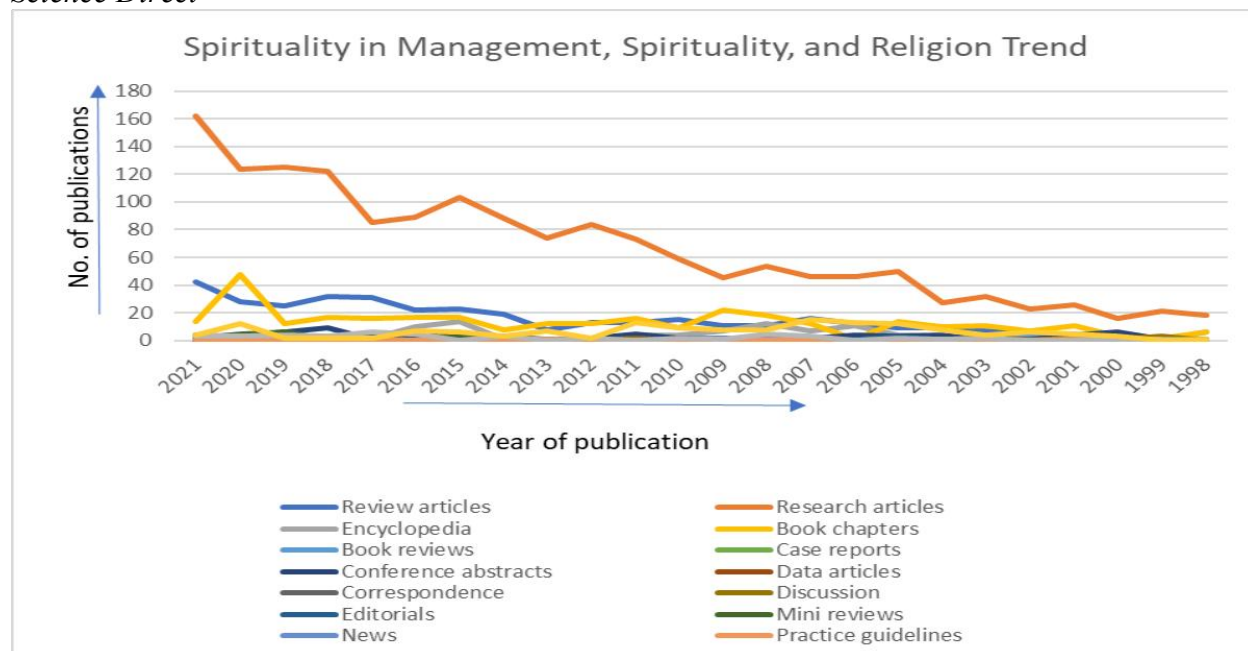
A bit atypical. However, review articles are going up
Spirituality in Operations and Supply Chain Management
Science Direct



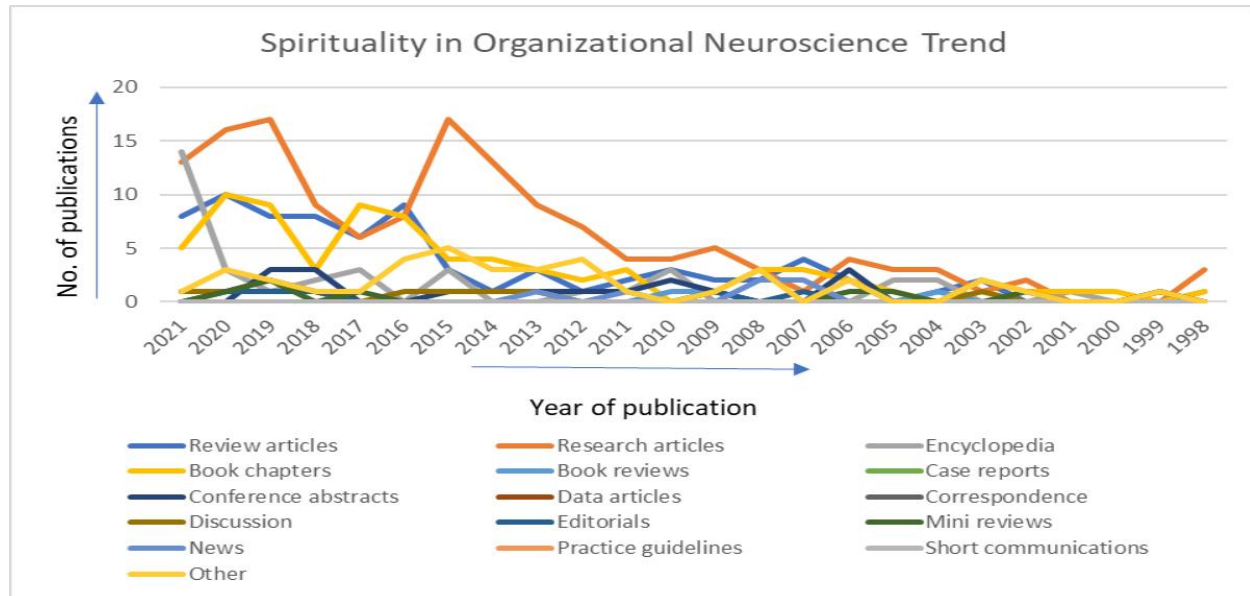
Atypical trend
Spirituality in Management History
Science Direct



A bit strange pattern with a break in 2019 for research articles
Spirituality in Management Spirituality and Religion
Science Direct



An upward trend
Spirituality in Organizational Neuroscience
Science direct



Atypical.

Results (Inference)

The analysis of data from Science Direct and JSTOR reveals a consistent and upward trajectory in research on spirituality and religion across the divisions of the Academy of Management (AOM) between 1998 and 2021. Almost all divisions demonstrate rising interest, with particularly strong trends in Organizational Behavior, Strategic Management, Human Resources, and International Management, while newer or specialized areas such as Technology and Innovation Management and Organizational Neuroscience show more recent growth.

The aggregate tables and graphs prepared for both databases confirm that spirituality is no longer a marginal theme. Instead, it has become a mainstream research interest, attracting attention across multiple subfields of management. The upward patterns observed are indicative not only of disciplinary expansion but also of a broader recognition that spirituality contributes to organizational effectiveness, labor engagement, and institutional trust.

Discussion

These findings underscore the evolving role of spirituality and religion in management and economics-oriented research. Three key points emerge:

1. **Sustained Growth of Scholarly Attention:** The upward trajectory across divisions reflects long-term academic interest. Spirituality is increasingly regarded as an explanatory factor in understanding management processes, labor outcomes, and institutional performance.
2. **Human Capital and Productivity:** Spirituality in the workplace is associated with greater employee engagement, job satisfaction, and well-being. These factors translate into measurable gains in productivity and labor efficiency, consistent with human capital theory.
3. **Institutional and Ethical Dimensions:** By promoting ethics, inclusivity, and trust, spirituality strengthens organizational legitimacy and reduces transaction costs. This resonates with institutional economics, where norms and values reduce opportunism and facilitate cooperation.

Furthermore, the interdisciplinary scope of AOM has enabled spirituality to gain traction as both a cultural and an economic construct. Its integration into management research parallels the modern workplace's demand for holistic approaches, where well-being, diversity, and ethical governance are essential to organizational success.

Conclusion

This study has examined the evolution, timing, and motivations behind integrating spirituality and religion into management scholarship, supported by evidence from publication trends across AOM divisions. The results demonstrate a remarkable and sustained upward trend, affirming the growing recognition of spirituality's relevance in organizational and economic contexts. The implications are significant. First, spirituality enhances employee well-being and motivation, leading to higher productivity. Second, it fosters ethical and inclusive leadership, contributing to institutional trust and organizational resilience. Third, its interdisciplinary relevance ensures that spirituality is not confined to a niche but permeates multiple domains of management thought and practice.

The Academy of Management has been central to this process, acting as a catalyst for dialogue, collaboration, and the dissemination of high-quality scholarship. Its role highlights how institutional platforms shape the trajectory of emerging research fields.

As organizations navigate global challenges, it is increasingly evident that the integration of spirituality into management is not a passing trend but a transformative and resilient force. By embracing spirituality, management scholarship and practice can advance toward more humane, ethical, and sustainable models of leadership and work organization.

This research therefore encourages continued exploration of the relationship between spirituality and management. Its upward trajectory demonstrates both intellectual legitimacy and practical relevance, affirming spirituality's place as a critical dimension in shaping the future of organizational behavior, labor markets, and institutional economics.

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