

How Do We Shape Christians for the Workplace?

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Abstract

While there are tools for assessing spiritual values in the workplace, there has been little research into how to spiritually form Christians for the workplace. What are the priorities of learning knowledge (cognition), skills (behaviors), and values (affections) that should be prioritized for a Christian to effectively navigate the modern workplace? These questions of spiritual formation are critical to Christian schools, theological colleges, Christian higher education providers, professional Christian organizations and university groups seeking to prepare workplace Christians who will be able to influence society and culture. What, then, is the shape of the *telos* of faithful workplace Christians, and how can they be formed?

This research contributes to this conversation by employing the Repertory Grid Technique (RGT)—a structured interview research method—allowing the discovery of individuals' personal constructs that influence their behavior, leading to a better understanding of the connection between faith and work. Interviewees are encouraged to tell the story of their spiritual formation. These narratives are subsequently analysed for integration of formation techniques with personal constructs. This paper includes findings from a pilot study of six Christian doctors, and recommendations for educators and individual workers. It will lay the groundwork for future research into the faithful worker in the contemporary workplace.

Biography

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Kara Martin has authored *Workshop: How to Use Your Work to Worship God*, and *Workshop 2: How to Flourish at Work*. She lectures at Mary Andrews College and Alphacrucis College, and has worked in media and communications, human resources, business analysis, and policy development. Kara is undertaking a PhD, researching how to effectively equip workplace Christians, and has had three chapters published in peer-reviewed books.

Introduction

In 2015 I was asked to spend some time mentoring and teaching young Christian doctors who were involved in the Christian Medical and Dental Fellowship Australia (CMDFA), a professional Christian organization with a long history around the world. It was difficult to know where to begin, so I started with some material I had been teaching in theological colleges on Jesus-shaped leadership and mentoring. My efforts were extremely well-received; in fact, there was a great hunger for any sort of Christian teaching that applied to the work that was taking such an enormous amount of their time and energy.

However, part of me was frustrated that I really had no idea about the endpoint of what I was doing; I was trying out some concepts, but the reality was that I had no idea what should be in the curriculum that equips Christians for their workplaces.

Organizations in the Faith–Work Space

This is the struggle that a lot of organizations face in this space, and there are many players:

- *Professional Christian organizations* such as the CMDFA, Nurses Christian Fellowship, and Lawyers Christian Fellowship;
- *Parachurch workplace organizations* such as City Bible Forum, Kingdom Business, and Business as Mission;

- *University Christian groups* preparing graduates for the workplace, such as International Fellowship of Evangelical Students, Cru/Power to Change, and Navigators;
- *Local churches* seeking to equip members for where 98 percent of their congregations spend 95 percent of their time (that is, outside church gatherings);
- *Theological colleges or seminaries*, many of which rely on students with no intention of going into paid Christian work (church, parachurch or mission) to help subsidise those who do; and
- *Christian vocational higher education providers* seeking to help their students integrate their faith into their other studies.

These organizations attempt to provide coherent material, and examples are included in the table below.

Table 1

Professional Christian organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on character • Ethical issues particular to the vocation • Concepts of calling to a particular vocation • Evangelism in the workplace • Bible study material pertinent to the vocation • Issues of stress or work–life balance¹
Parachurch workplace organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workplace evangelism • Apologetics • Work issues such as dealing with ambition or work idolatry

¹ The Christian Medical and Dental Fellowship Australia website “Resource” links refer to Ethics, Bible Study material pertinent to the vocation, and *Luke’s Journal*, which regularly prints articles on calling (e.g., “Bringing Spirituality into Clinical Practice,” 22 no. 2 [Sep 2017]), evangelism (e.g., “Sharing Comfort through Christ,” 23 no. 1 [Jan 2018]), character (e.g., “Compassionate Christian Healthcare,” 23 no. 2 [June 2018]). See <http://www.cmdfa.org.au/Resources/resources>. As another example, the Lawyers Christian Fellowship (headquartered in the United Kingdom) has resources under the categories of Evangelism, Biblical Legal Principles, Life as a Lawyer-to-be, and vocational specific issues such as Business and Family Law. See “Library,” <https://lawcf.org/resources/library>.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with excellence²
University Christian groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal spiritual disciplines (Bible reading and prayer) • Evangelism • Importance of Christian character³
Local churches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A basic theology of work • Importance of good (godly) character • Priority of evangelism • Importance of balancing church and work⁴
Theological colleges or seminaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An introduction to a theology of work • Pastoral care issues for workplace Christians • Ethical issues for workplace Christians • Examination of different worldviews • Theology for everyday life⁵

² City Bible Forum covers topics on apologetics (such as other religions, Jesus, Christianity, Science, and Faith), and work issues (work–life balance, money and wealth). See “Resource Library | City Bible Forum,” <https://citybibleforum.org/library>. Business as Mission has global reports that cover topics such as Biblical Foundations, and Church Planting. The four pillars of equipping are described as personal character, biblical foundations, business excellence, and best practice. See “Get Started—Business as Mission,” <http://businessasmission.com/get-started/#tab-id-4>.

³ International Fellowship of Evangelical Students describes its programs as focused on evangelism and leadership development which includes spiritual disciplines and a Christian witness on key issues. See “Our Work,” <https://www.ifesworld.org/en/our-work>. Navigators describe their role thus: “Our emphasis is on training and supporting students to help them grow their relationship with Jesus and their ability to lead their friends and classmates towards Christ. Each campus group regularly spend time reading and studying the Bible, praying, and volunteering in the local community.” See “Student,” <https://navigators.org.au/community/student/>.

⁴ This list comes from requests for me to preach and my own surveys of churches in Australia. A review of Sermon Central reveals 4,312 sermons (although only the 50th most viewed sermon dealt directly with a work topic: ambition), the majority of which focus on a basic theology of work (“Faith at work”), character (“Integrity”), being a witness for the Lord (“God Working Attitude”), and focusing on God’s work not ours (“Work Worth Doing”). See “Sermons about Work—SermonCentral.Com.”

⁵ My focus is on Australian theological colleges which are the same as seminaries in the USA. The Australian College of Theology is a consortium of 18 colleges around Australia and has five distinct units dealing with faith and work: A Biblical Theology of Work, Introduction to Workplace Ministry, Mentoring and Pastoral Care of Workers, Putting Faith to Work, and Finding your Vocation (aka Principles of Vocational Stewardship). Workplace ethical issues may be considered as a subset of units on ethics. There are five units on worldview and apologetics, and one unit on theology for everyday life. See “Our Units—Australian College of Theology,” <https://www.actheology.edu.au/our-units/>.

Christian vocational higher education providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biblical overview with vocational application • Examination of different worldviews • Ethics for particular vocations⁶
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Issues with What Is Offered

On first glance, this is an impressive list of faith–work materials. However, for a range of reasons explored below, it is possible to *attend these organizations* and not encounter any vocational teaching at all, particularly when provided by churches and theological colleges. Further, while all this material may be provided, many workplace Christians are unaware of its existence or relevance, having neatly divided their Sundays from their Mondays.

For leaders of organizations, there is rarely a concept of a coherent curriculum of teaching that would assist Christians to rediscover how integral faith is to work. There is a smorgasbord of material made available, and members or students are expected to work their way through it.

For churches, the availability and depth of material is dependent on the willingness of church leadership to prioritize an area which is not core to church programs. While I would argue that it is the role of the church to equip every church member for expression of their faith in every aspect of life, the focus of many churches is on resourcing and implementing their internal programs.

In theological colleges, the material is usually available as electives, and often not identified as part of recommended learning pathways.⁷

⁶ One college in Australia (Excelsia) teaches worldview, ethics, biblical studies, and vocation. See “Integrative Studies | Christian College | Excelsia College,” <https://excelsia.edu.au/courses/integrative-studies/>. Alphacrucis College includes units on Christian Worldview and Christian Ethics as core. As an sample, see “Bachelor of Business,” <https://www.ac.edu.au/awards/bachelor-business/>. Christian Heritage College has three units covering Christian worldview including an explanation of Christian doctrine, aspects of a Christian worldview using the unifying theme of the kingdom of God, and comparison with other religions and worldviews. See “CHC | Bachelor of Business,” <https://www.chc.edu.au/courses/business/bachelor-of-business/>.

⁷ In the Australian College of Theology, none of the units identified in footnote 5 are core units; all are electives. None of those electives are identified in the description for the key vocational course of Master of Divinity. See “Course—Australian College of Theology,” <https://www.actheology.edu.au/course/MDIV02/>.

In Christian vocational colleges the units are usually compulsory, but this tends to mean they are generalist in application, and many of the vocational applications are left up to the students to make. An example of this was a college I taught in where units included overviews of the Old Testament and New Testament with no direct application to the other study areas of the students. Assessments were exegetical essays, rather than opportunities to thoughtfully explore connections between the text and their own area of study.⁸

The Integration Gap

There are some basic distinctions and borderline dualistic divisions in this material that cause issues for anyone wanting to genuinely integrate their faith with their work:

Internal (example: character)	External (example: worldviews)
Sacred (example: Bible studies)	Secular (example: ethics)
Ministry (example: evangelism)	Work (example: calling)
Knowledge (example: biblical narrative)	Skills (example: apologetical conversations)
Foundation (example: spiritual disciplines)	Expression (example: church–work balance)
Being (example: theology of work)	Doing (example: working excellently)

These binaries mean that individuals have to forge the connection between the lists on the left and the lists on the right. To make the issue more difficult for the individual workplace Christian, the list on the left is often prioritised and valued more highly than the list on the right.⁹

My contention is that, typically, workplace Christians are not asked what they want to learn or need to learn. There is a tendency in Christian organizations for the content to be

⁸ This was a college which now offers a broader range of options as a direct result of me applying a unit vocationally, with resulting positive feedback from students both non-Christian and Christian.

⁹ This preference is illustrated through what units are core at theological colleges and in university groups (see footnotes 3, 5, and 7).

developed by those in leadership, then delivered without enquiry or feedback from the congregation, members, or students in their care.¹⁰

One counter to this might be that students/clients/members of Christian organizations are not the best people to be consulted in terms of their learning needs. Metaphorically, this is equivalent to a patient self-diagnosing versus a doctor advising. However, there is a growing body of evidence of the need for patient consultation in diagnosis, with the conclusion that, “Making sense of illness can be enhanced by inviting and recognizing the patient’s story.”¹¹ In education in Australia, there is a growing move toward inquiry-based pedagogy which is student-centered and motivated, and builds on prior student experience¹²; and in a recent study this was expanded to pre-service teacher training with “increased engagement and enhanced learning outcomes.”¹³

This research is about consultation with mature faith-work integrators (all recommended by professional Christian organizations), and gaining value from their extensive experience in application of faith in workplace settings.

What Is Needed

In thirty years on the frontline of the nexus between faith and work, this growing awareness of the gaps drove me to desire more consultation with workplace Christians, leading to the development of coherent curricular concepts for organizations equipping workplace Christians. While a survey of workplace Christians was a useful starting place, what was required was a tool that would go deeper.

¹⁰ This is an assertion by observation following years of being involved in leadership of theological colleges, on faculty, as an adjunct, in academic committees, and on the boards of colleges; working in and with university groups, professional Christian groups, and parachurch organizations; and being an Elder with a church while preaching and speaking at churches across the Protestant denominational spectrum in the USA, Singapore, Malaysia, and Australia: Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Uniting, Pentecostal, Churches of Christ.

¹¹ Undeland and Malterud, “Diagnostic Interaction.”

¹² “Lutheran-Education-Queensland-Inquiry-Based-Learning.Pdf.” In this explainer for schools overseen by Lutheran Education in Queensland, a range of benefits of student-centered inquiry-based learning are explored.

¹³ Preston, Harvie, and Wallace, “Inquiry-Based Learning in Teacher Education.” In this 2015 article, Preston et al apply the same methodology core to the Australian Curriculum to teacher training.

I am very grateful to Professor Felix Tan, of Excelsia College, who introduced me to the Repertory Grid Technique.¹⁴ This tool was originally developed by George Kelly (1955/1991) to investigate his Personal Construct Theory, but has now been applied in organizational settings, including job design where it is used to interrogate the usual wish list of characteristics required for roles.

The technique involves an interviewee thinking of three work colleagues in a particular role, and when offered a particular role variable (construct), describe narratives of two colleagues who demonstrate the variable positively, and one who demonstrates the variable negatively. In applying the technique to the role of being a workplace Christian, I have been able to identify priorities of learning knowledge (cognition), skills (behaviors) and values (affections) as well as gathering a wealth of examples of what good expression looks like.

There were several difficulties with applying the technique:

- I could only survey those vocations where Christians observed other Christians in the workplace. For this reason, I decided to focus on doctors.
- I had to formulate a list of constructs (cognitive, behavioral, and affective) since early interviews revealed that interviewees struggled to offer these spontaneously when considering integration of faith and work (as contrasted with thinking of the essential qualities for paid work roles). This reveals the lack of language that Christians have to articulate how faith is integral to work.

However, the technique overcomes one of the challenges of capturing information about integration, often done through surveys¹⁵ or narratives;¹⁶ that is, many Christians downplay their own abilities in areas (a false idea of humility).

¹⁴ Felix Tan has pioneered the use of Repertory Grid Technique in Information Systems in identifying IS Manager constructs. See Tan and Hunter, "The Repertory Grid Technique."

¹⁵ The best known of these is developed by Miller and Ewest, "The Integration Box (TIB)."

¹⁶ One of the latest examples is Harjanto, *The Development of Vocational Stewardship*—a series of interviews and narratives among Indonesian Christian Professionals.

What Has Emerged

Knowledge

What would we imagine we would need to *know* to be effective as Christians in integrating our faith at work? Interviewees were asked to choose a first and second priority from the following list:¹⁷

- The sacred/secular dichotomy
- The biblical narrative
- A basic theology of work
- A history of work
- Worldviews and how to engage with them
- Spiritual disciplines that deepen intimacy with God
- Ethical framework for decision-making
- A basic understanding of people, groups and organizations.

The most frequently chosen construct was “Spiritual disciplines that deepen intimacy with God.”

Spiritual disciplines are those practices that deepen our personal relationship with God. They usually include practices of daily Bible reading and prayer, but they can also include a range of practices such as: the inward disciplines of prayer, fasting, meditation, and study in the Christian life; the outward disciplines of simplicity, solitude, submission, and service; and the corporate disciplines of confession, worship, guidance, and celebration.¹⁸

One interviewee commented that such disciplines are essential “for keeping grounded, especially when faith is under attack.”

¹⁷ Development of the list of constructs resulted from studies of what is taught at various theological colleges, Christian higher education providers, and Christian organizations.

¹⁸ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*.

Interviewees were then asked to tell some stories of those who demonstrate this construct.¹⁹

You can tell Anne has a deep foundation with God because of her speech and the way she carries herself. It shows in the way that she prays, and everything she says and does. You can even see it in the things she asks prayer for, such as building God's kingdom and her consideration for others.

Brenda reads verses and reflects on them deeply. You can sense in her a deep understanding of God. At work you will see her buying chocolate for the young workers to encourage them.

Carl naturally talks about faith in a way that is compelling because he has a genuine relationship with God. His faith underpins everything he does, and you can see that it is fundamental to who he is and what he does.

Darren talks about Jesus with every patient because he sees faith as fundamental to humanity. He explains how spiritual brokenness contributes to their disease. He is a prayerful person. He knows how to deal with the tough situations: people with addiction, who are experiencing terrible consequences from their choices. He holds on to a sense of hope, and gives others hope that there is an opportunity for restoration, that there is something worthwhile they can look forward to.

Elaine prays frequently and asks others for prayer. She is grateful to God for answered prayer.

Interviewees were also asked to identify stories that demonstrate when this construct is negatively demonstrated, to further describe what this looks like by contrast:

You cannot see as much evidence in Felicity's life that she is a person of faith. She comes across as a very detached and logical person.

¹⁹ Note that names have been given to help us identify with respondents, but changed from the original.

George does not reveal much about his personal circumstances. I work closely with him, yet he hardly ever talks about faith and work. When I've brought it up, it has been awkward.

Harold is not committed to a Christian community and is not supporting his family in going to church. When he does show up, it seems he is only going to church for show.

"A basic theology of work" was seen by a couple of interviewees as very important. This would cover a biblical view of work in the bigger story of what God is doing in the world. Typical basic theologies cover the four-point gospel outline that work is good, working is cursed, work can be redeemed, and there will be work in the new creation. The narratives of when this construct is demonstrated positively include:

Ian understands that work is not everything; he knows that family is important, and that rest is important. He knows that when he works, he is committed to work.

John treats people well, he doesn't gossip or participate in gossip. He understands God's intention for work.

Katie demonstrates a very balanced theology of work, and knows her boundaries, practising good self-care.

Lynne enjoys her work, and she works really hard, often going beyond what is required. She is widely recognized as reliable.

Then, interviewees related stories of when there is no understanding of a basic theology of work.

Max places too much importance on work, and he drags his family around because of his work. He talks himself up, elevates himself as a doctor, enjoys the privileges and perks.

Nancy is a workaholic and does not have good boundaries.

This commentary on what good theology does is interesting. Having a good biblical understanding of work should ensure that work is in its right place compared to other demands on our time and our heart. Both examples of poor understanding of a theology of work were directed at those who work too hard, neglecting family and other priorities. It also means that work is having a poor impact on one's character.

Skill

In the preparation for faith–work integration, churches and theological colleges and professional Christian groups have almost exclusively focused on cognition: improved knowledge. Even when teaching about prayer we have tended to do biblical studies on prayer rather than demonstrating how to pray. Mostly, we hope workplace disciples will pick up the skills they need through osmosis. I have found the same in some colleges where teaching on biblical exegesis has not actually seen exegesis as a skill rather than as something you mysteriously learn by reading lots of exegetical examples!

What *skills* would be useful to learn as a workplace Christian? This was the longest list of the three considered. (The second longest was *values*, while the shortest list was *knowledge*). Interviewees were asked to choose from the following:

- Build authentic relationships
- Demonstrate excellent competency for the job
- Understand systems so that one can engage with them for the common good
- Engage with the popular and work culture
- Understand and respond to suffering
- Imagine and innovate
- Counter suspicion and hostility with hospitality
- Pray deeply
- Exegete the Bible with application in work context
- Influence others through servant leadership

- Theologically reflect on current issues and situations
- Connect biblical material with work
- Synthesise a biblical worldview with work
- Transform working, working relationships, the workplace, and work recipients through gospel renewal.

In the initial interviews conducted for the research, “Building authentic relationships” emerged a top priority. This was fascinating considering no one in society is taught how to form relationships beyond “how to be a good friend” classes in kindergarten, and marriage preparation classes. It is a complex skill to form adult relationships with people we might not agree with, and sometimes do not even like, so that we can effectively work with them, and build a platform for sharing meaning.

A clear selection from this group of interviewees was “Influence others through servant leadership.” Servant leadership is a distinctive Christian practice.²⁰ In the workplaces which most of the interviewees inhabit, the dominant leadership style is the “hero” leader: autocratic, privileged, and used to being worshipped.²¹ Jesus introduced an idea of leadership marked by humility, with a desire to serve rather than to be served.²² These characteristics are brought out in the stories shared by interviewees of those who demonstrate this construct:

Aaron is approachable for problems and requests. He is a senior leader, and he does not put himself on a pedestal, but works alongside others, always looking to help those around him improve.

Beatrice works in a Christian hospital, and she worships at the Cathedral. She has a cell group which is very Bible-based and evangelical. She knows a lot of Bible. She joins the mission teams and she is the most active in doing things whenever there is a need, helping and serving others. Recently there was a doctor from Sydney who

²⁰ See Roach, *The Servant-Leadership Style of Jesus*.

²¹ See Fulop and Day, “From Leader to Leadership.”

²² See “Jesus-shaped leadership” in Martin, *Workship 2*.

needed upskilling in medical skills for preventative medicine. She took up the servant-leadership role and coordinated his upskilling through a number of hospitals, so he could observe and learn. She took initiative. She is very effective at getting others to do things. She ignores the personal cost for the sake of others and advancing God's kingdom.

Colin thinks ahead, and anticipates needs of others. He does the messy, smelly dirty stuff that most leaders avoid, or think is "beneath him." He is eager to learn, asking lots of questions. He has tissues ready for patients receiving bad news.

Dana loves buying chocolate and coffee for others; she is very generous, nurturing and supportive of all her work colleagues. She is also generous with her time, and her words.

When there was a time of severe bullying, Eric stepped in when he didn't have to and spoke up for justice, and defended those who resigned. As a consequence, he was criticised by management.

Francis takes responsibility for things, checking to see how others are, and puts others before himself.

Georgina makes sure people feel included. She shows people that they are loved through simple gestures such as baking food for them.

Interviewees were also asked to identify stories of where it is not done well, to further describe what this looks like by contrast.

Henry lords it over others, and put himself on a pedestal. His office door is always closed; he is never available. He considered what he was doing as always more important than the person in front of him.

Ivor lacks humility and is always putting himself first. When it is a busy time we take turns taking breaks, but he is the first person out the door rather than checking with others.

Jenny runs her area as if she is a dictator in charge of a small kingdom. She does not seem to notice what a massive ego she has.

The second area chosen was the skill of “Transforming working, working relationships, the workplace and work recipients through gospel renewal.” As one interviewee commented: “the gospel is at the center of transforming us and then flows through to everything. It also involves building authentic relationships: not to get something out of them but because I want to work with them.” Another commented that this goes “beyond the spiritual; applying faith to every part of the work.”

The narratives of when this construct is demonstrated positively include:

Ken builds authentic relationships, mentoring and encouraging them, and going deeper with people. People see him as a friend rather than a threat. The sense of respect and care he offers permeates the workplace.

The gospel informs Len’s whole life, his behavior and his choice of career. He is not as ambitious as others because he prioritizes service, faith and family. He stands out from those around him because he is not obsessed with promotion, money, or success. Len’s work doesn’t identify who he is; he focuses on relationships instead.

Matt is a surgeon, and is busy with a young family. He should be stressed out but he is a beautiful gentle person all the time. He is consistently kind, generous with his time, friendly and pleasant, and happy to teach. He does the small things that make him stand out in terms of colleagues and patients. Most of his fellow leaders act like jerks. Matt doesn’t get into office politics; he changes the team atmosphere to be positive.

Neridah does the simple things like showing kindness and patience, which aren’t common in the workplace. She speaks well of other people. She is also really skilled and interacts well with people.

Oliver is at the forefront of working with difficult people, and his work is intense. He has this knack for being grounded and diplomatic. He doesn't set people off, even in a stressful environment. He is very considerate. He would never put someone down, in spite of the crap he faces. He is always working to affirm others. He makes it a point to pay someone a formal compliment rather than a formal complaint. He could complain about doctors who are difficult. There was one colleague, a surgeon, who was particularly obliging, and he made it a point to inform his department heads how this doctor made it easy for Oliver to get some work done. The department heads talked, and the compliment became communicated on and articulated the sort of behavior should occur in the workplace. Oliver transforms the workplace by highlighting the positive.

Penny is great at encouraging people and thanking them for their hard work. She is genuine in relating to people. She tries to make the workplace better through encouragement.

Queenie is always sharing food. She makes people feel included, and part of the team. She is different by not complaining all the time. She tries to make the workplace better rather than bitter.

Interviewees then shared stories of workplace Christians who lack skills in transforming the workplace.

Rick actively avoids the opportunity to share his faith or integrate because he does not see the gospel as having a place in the workplace. He acts as if relationships are not as important as the work that needs to be done. He has no desire to transform the workplace.

Sue is rude and brief with people, and difficult to distinguish from others. She complains about things and swears at work. Sue perpetuates the poor culture rather than transforming and renewing it in positive ways.

I saw Tanya dismissive of a request from a nurse, thereby highlighting the stratification, rather than seeking to break down barriers.

Values

As Christians, our character is our best promotion of Christ, and lack of character is the worst detraction from the name of Christ.²³ While many would agree that *values* are important, we do not know how to grow those values in people. Identifying the behavior that reveals the values is part of the way forward, and this is what is revealed in the interviews.

Interviewees were asked to choose from the following values:

- Intimacy with God as the basis for relationship with others and the world
- Working in all its variety and aspects
- Faithful working
- Godly (good) character
- Serving people and the organization
- The church gathered as support for the church scattered
- Continuous learning and personal spiritual formation
- Human flourishing
- Community flourishing
- Work as a means of worship
- Humility as a corrective to the drivenness of modern working
- Seeking justice for others
- A felt call to a place of working.

A clear selection among this group of interviewees was “Godly character.” This is not surprising, since it is the broadest description of the set of values that might be expected to be revealed. As one interviewee said: “competence in the job is important to a certain level, but

²³ See this blogpiece by a pastor and commentator hosted by Christianity Today: Vaters, “A Question Of Character.”

godly character is not covered by good competence.” Thus, godly character is the way the competent Christian doctor stands out.

Interviewees revealed the following stories of when godly character is revealed:

The way Adam treats others reveals his character. There is genuine care and it is clear that he wants the best for others. He never puts down or bad-mouths others.

If he makes a mistake, Ben admits it. If something hasn't been done right, he will learn from it. Ben doesn't try to hide or excuse mistakes, he learns and improves for next time.

Caitlyn doesn't complain through a tough situation. She was asked to do something extra in an environment that was not ideal, with equipment that failed, yet the joy of the work before her meant she kept going. She saw any discomfort as momentary. She expressed a joy and peace in spite of circumstances.

Delia is exemplary. She brings a lot of positive energy and fosters a nurturing environment in the workplace. As an educator as well as a clinician, she influences a lot of people, and inspires a lot of people. She is a good role model. She lives out the values: helping others to flourish and a community to flourish. Out of her good character everything else flows.

Given the intensity of Edward's work, he always does it with excellence. He is never lazy. He puts his heart and soul into his work. His colleagues like him. He gets such positive comments on his 360 [performance review], from nurses, allied health, pharmacists, as well as doctor colleagues. If you have good character you are valued in the workplace. He is light in the workplace.

Felicity demonstrates compassion, integrity, kindness, and sacrificial and unconditional love. One way she does this is speaking up against injustice.

Interviewees were also asked to identify stories of where it is not done well, to further describe what this looks like by contrast:

Gary insists on getting his own way. His intention is to get ahead. He is always competing, looking out for himself. You know he always has an agenda.

Whenever Helen faces a difficulty she will blow it out of proportion and become the center of attention, so that she attracts care and concern. The irony is that godly character would minimise the difficulty. She thinks the worst of every situation and every person.

Isaiah doesn't have much integrity. He goes to big conferences and stays in fancy hotels sponsored by drug companies. He never considers the ethical implications. To be a good example to colleagues, one's integrity is so important. The second value chosen was "Valuing intimacy with God as the basis for relationship with others and the world." As one interviewee commented: "the closer we get to God, the more we are aware of our own failings and need for God."

The narratives of when this construct is demonstrated positively include:

Jill prays all the time, and you can tell she is deep with God because of the things that concern her, such as other Christians being persecuted. She is aware of the bigger picture of the spiritual reality.

Kim is active in the hospital, showing individual care and concern. She does little acts of kindness and develops close relationships with others.

Leo has a strong understanding of who God is and that affects the way he engages with people professionally and personally. His intimacy with God flows out into all his words and actions.

Michael is a godly guy: respectful, encouraging of others, letting people see his relationship with God. He is respected because of his values that flow from his intimate relationship with God.

In contrast, consider this story of when someone does not operate from this value of intimacy with God:

Pride and arrogance can emerge if you are not close to God. Ned is also willing to go the way of the world, and respect of peers is more important to him than a faithful relationship with God.²⁴

Conclusions

This pilot study has demonstrated both the effectiveness of the research method, and the value of the data obtained. It has contradicted some of the assumptions applied by organizations, and also has elicited a wealth of stories with the potential to form and inspire workplace Christians.

This research has the potential to benefit a range of Christian organizations operating in the intersection of faith and work to clarify the skills, knowledge, and values that would best equip Christians to be integral in the workplace. The knowledge, skills, and values already identified are not those which typically are addressed in offerings from those organizations, as can be seen by reference to Table 1.

Further, the stories that illustrate what those variables look like in practice, enable contextualization beyond the medical workplaces investigated. The power of story as a means of describing and changing complex behavior is well documented. Bruner was among the first to identify that narrative is the primary way that humans construct reality.²⁵ The particular features that he highlights are the fact that it is outside time, particular to a person, invites awareness of emotional state, allows meaning-making, demonstrates exception to conventional expectations, bears witness to reality, is recognizable, establishes new norms, can be translated into other contexts, and is able to be absorbed into other stories.

Advancing Bruner's work, Drumm has established how storytelling can be used to develop skills and shape systems. She suggests this is possible because stories center on

²⁴ Note that this was one area where interviewees found it difficult to comment on, that is, how do we measure someone's intimacy with God?

²⁵ Jerome Bruner, "The Narrative Construction of Reality," 4.

people, they enrich understanding, develop empathy, allow for reflection, are not limited to one objective truth, represent both individual and communal reality, as well as aiding learning and development.²⁶

In Australia there is considerable debate about the public expression of faith, including in the workplace (as the sacking of Israel Folau by Rugby Australia, the retaliatory legal action, and the ongoing media speculation has aptly demonstrated²⁷). What is needed is a coordinated and focused application of precious resources on developing the particular variables that are most likely to form workplace Christians who commend Jesus and the gospel, that is, the “good news” of the reconciling work of Christ and the inauguration of the Kingdom of God.

Future Research

These pilot interviews were conducted with six doctors selected by the Christian Medical and Dental Fellowship of Australia. However, more interviews would confirm the validity of the responses.

Another question is whether there are vocational differences for Christians integrating their faith in other areas of work. These results need to be compared and contrasted with interviews with other groups. Teachers are another vocational group where the interaction with other Christians in the workplace would allow the RGT to be applied.

Finally, it would be good to compare the results with Christians outside the “helping” professions, particularly Christians operating at a different educational level, and in a different work culture. It is intended that interviews be conducted with tradespeople.

²⁶ Michelle Drumm, “The Role of Personal Storytelling in Practice,” 4–6.

²⁷ As a sample, see “ABC Search.”

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