

WORKPLACE SPIRITUALITY

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Abstract

Employees today, are more and more, seeking to bring their entire selves to work, both in body and spirit. The idea of ‘checking out the soul at the gates’ when coming to work, no longer seems to appeal. As Peter Pruzan points out, in ‘Leading with Wisdom’, most people wish to live in synergy with their basic values, ethics, and belief systems.¹ When organizations and workplaces are able to create environments that are conducive to employees experiencing harmony in behaviour and belief, their values and their work, and a sense of purpose in their vocation, a certain pattern of spiritual orientation will emerge. Existing literature details the role of a leader’s spirituality in creating a spiritual orientation in the organization, but workplace spirituality is also the result of the engineering and creation of situations, interactions, value systems, and a code of conduct that is conducive to employees feeling

nourishment for their spirits, and a sense of fulfilment. Workplace Spirituality in its basic element is awareness, interconnectedness with one another and a higher existence, a sense of fulfilment, and value and meaning to ones vocation. The basic elements that constitute the framework conducive to this include ethics, trust, and fairness of decisions, respect, honesty and integrity of actions. When managers are able to integrate these values into their roles, seamlessly, and effortlessly, and encourage their teams, protégées, subordinates to follow suit, and even set an example for their reporting heads, and senior management to derive from, they are ensuring the creation of an environment, and subsequently a business, that thrives on meaningful contribution, both internally and externally. We attempt through this paper, to study the relationship between these values in managers and collective workplace spirituality, a practical approach to integrating spirituality in the workplace.

Keywords: workplace spirituality, values, managerial behaviour

Introduction

Spirituality in organizations is an area gaining increasing popularity. Academicians have attempted to define and measure spirituality quantitativelyⁱⁱand qualitativelyⁱⁱⁱ, and both,^{iv} as a

precursor to understanding how to integrate spirituality into an organization. The growing interest, however, is on how spirituality improves organizational performance, and the impact of spiritual leadership on organizational performance.

What appear to be major triggers for employees to seek a conscious recognition of their spiritual needs in their workplace are increasing ethnic and spiritual diversity, larger cognizance of social and human rights and justice, and a reaction to old-fashioned approaches. Businesses on the other hand are realizing the importance of recognizing employees as beyond being mere 'resources' or 'manpower requirements' for the organization. The recognition of employees as 'members' in their complete form, is emerging. How employees view organizational spirituality is also likely to impact their attitudes and beliefs about their work. Workplace spirituality can be examined from individual and organizational (collective) perspectives. Organizational spirituality appears through data and research to matter deeply in relation with organizational outcomes, employee attitudes and behavioural patterns. Individual spirituality at the workplace is more intrinsic and dependant on maturity and emotional evolution of the individual employees. Whilst attitudinal and attachment related work consequences such as job satisfaction, job involvement, and loyalty have all been found linked to the vital bottom-line of the company's

performance, not much examination has been done to determine their relationship with spiritual values, or values that are demonstrated by managers, in the workplace.

Definitions of Spirituality and Workplace Spirituality

Nash has found three main components in the definitions of spirituality – the inner self or sense of oneness, presence of a force higher than the self, and purpose and meaning in everyday life.^{vi} “The basic feeling of being connected with one’s complete self, others, and the entire universe”, is how Mitroff and Denton define spirituality.^{vii} Neck and Milliman define spirituality as “expressing our desires to find meaning and purpose in our lives and is a process of living out one’s set of deeply held personal values”.^{viii} Academicians suggest that workplace spirituality reflects employee experiences, such as a sense of meaning, purpose, community, and transcendence at workplace.^{ix} While there are several definitions of workplace spirituality (Gotsis and Kortezi, 2008), quite a few of them include the dimensions of meaning in work and community at work, though the terms used may take various forms such as calling, purpose, belonging, membership, and connectedness.^x Neal (1997) has suggested that the difficulty of defining spirituality comes from trying to objectify and categorise an idea and phenomenon that is quite subjective and beyond standardization.^{xi} As a result there are as many

definitions as there are writers about them. Schmidt-Wilk, Heaton, and Steingard suggest that the definitions of spirituality can be categorised as 1) those that define it as an inner personal experience, 2) those that focus on values and ethics and 3) those that focus on behaviours.^{xii} What can be diagnosed as the sum of expressions from these definitions is that workplace spirituality refers to the environment in which an employee feels a sense of purpose and can perform more energetically, as he believes and feels he is in alignment with a purpose larger than himself. We can define workplace spirituality as the recognition that employees have an inner life that nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work that takes place in the context of community; thus specifying three components: inner life, meaningful work and community. A spiritual workplace is an employee-friendly work environment that recognizes, supports, and develops the spirit of its employees. Workplace spirituality, hence, is a multi dimensional phenomenon.

Workplace Spirituality and Organizational culture

Research has shown that there is a relationship between organizational culture and the spiritual substance within the founders and leaders of an organization. i.e. the leaders inclination and belief systems are reflective of the culture fostered in the organization. This is communicated via the

organization's mission, vision, policies, and procedures. Today, consumers, regulators, media and general public have started viewing companies from a characterological viewpoint. They are paying more attention to what is happening inside the place, and now care about the inner lives and character of the way the firm does its business - Integrity, character and culture are of paramount interest. The effort taken in building trust and transparency by the organization is being examined. As a result, organizational models have undergone a change and older dictatorial models have made way for more transparent and free cultures. As N.S.Raghavan, Joint Founder of Infosys puts it, 'organizational cultures cannot be built by speaking about the values and belief systems. Even if you have a rulebook that says differently, people will still follow what their managers do. They will follow the behaviour they observe, not the one that they read in a rulebook. It is not the rules, it is the spirit in which the action is done'.^{xiii} People are born as good people; they are not born to cheat; circumstances affect them and their behaviour..

Applying *sensemaking* to the study of workplace spirituality allows for an understanding of how individuals make sense of workplace spirituality, how they enact it, and what consequences differences in meaning can have on the individual and ultimately the culture of the organization.^{xiv} Culture guides individual and

collective behaviour. An organization's culture consists of basic beliefs, values, and norms which are reflected through the organization's vision and mission, decision-making, behavioural patterns and embedding of justice and equality. Stephen Covey, in *Leading with Wisdom* has stated that in order to align people with their value systems and foster a climate of workplace spirituality, one must get them to think in terms of their mission and vision and the values that they want to put into their life and then design an accountability system that can institutionalize the same.^{xv}

A recent study done by LRN, an organization that audits and transforms organizational cultures, showed that 94% of the employees surveyed, said it was critical for them to work for companies with a strong commitment to values. A large portion, 84% even said that they were willing to be paid less while working for an ethical company, versus a larger salary whilst working for a company with questionable methods and character.

As Dov Siedman says, people and companies align on values.^{xvi} Long term value can arise when companies and people mutually embrace the *hows* of business, long after the short term *whats* have expired. What transpires through these discussions is the fact that employees are seeking an environment and workplace that is willing to nurture and respect their true beings, in interactions that reflect honesty and virtue. Spirituality at work is also about the notion that spiritual beings not only express inner life needs

by seeking meaningful work, but that part of seeking meaning is in context to other human beings as well in the workplace community. Bureaucratic and scientific methods of management are giving way to emotional and spiritual developmental models where work itself is being rediscovered as a source of spiritual growth and connection to others (Mirvis,1993). Companies are turning in search of a 'soul' as a way to foster creativity (William Miller, Global Dharma) and to motivate employees; dimensions that have less to do with rules and regulations, work force order, formulas and rationale are giving way to cultures of purpose, meaning, emotions and spiritual quotient. The values that form a part of the organization's culture can be fortified as more and more employees seek to bring their true and complete self, their whole person, to work. As employers react to these changes, the culture undergoes a change and ethical behavioural patterns become a preferred choice. Irrespective of the nomenclature one may choose to label the phenomenon, there seems to be a basic understanding that people wish to live integrated lives, holistic, with the organizational cultures that recognize their spiritual needs and existence. The best and brightest of MBAs are willing to forgo high salaries in lieu of working with companies that have reputations of fair dealing cultures and values. Yesterday's motto was lean and mean, today's motto is lean and meaningful.

The work of Milliman et al. on the subject of organizational values leading to organizational spirituality is strengthened by the application of their theory to successful companies like Southwest Airlines, who Milliman considers to be an example of a spiritual organization. Chappel(1993,1994) came to the conclusion that beliefs shape strategy. Creating a spiritual climate allows for workers to be fully engaged. In contrast if the driving principle of the company is to maximize profits, workers will limit themselves to the bare minimum required of them.

Degrees of Workplace spirituality

A study of workplace spirituality mandates a mention of the three degrees of orientation and interaction:. at the most basic level, workplace spirituality can be viewed as the expression of one's own spiritual ideas and values in the workplace- a simple application of personal spirituality in the work environment; a judgement of value based decisions and interactions.. At level two, it is the experience of the employees, perceptions of the culture that exists in the organization.. The third stage of workplace spirituality, (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, JOBE,2008) describes interactional spirituality, which is a result of the individual's spiritual beliefs and value system, with that of the organizations spiritual values. According to Mitroff and Denton, if there was one word to describe spirituality, it would be 'interconnectedness', level three. The friendship

that Noland, in the movie *Cast Away*, develops with a volleyball – Wilson, is a delicate nuance made to the fact that human beings desire connection to other beings, a sense of interconnectedness. The significance of this statement is that individuals who are connected with each other exhibited greater levels of spirituality than those individuals who were not connected with each other, in the context of the workplace. Jurkiewicz and Giacalone describe interconnectedness as relationships with others that provide positive feelings. Mehta et. al, (2010) relate that employees find nourishment for both the vertical and horizontal dimensions of their spirituality at work.

In 2003, Joan Marques on Spirituality in the Workplace, identified 19 themes for a spiritual workplace, which included ethics, truth, trust, respect, openness, team orientation and interconnectedness, amongst others, which if further classified, could be categorised into the three levels as described by Giacalone and Jurkiewicz.

Managerial behaviour as Precursor to Workplace spirituality

Managers should be fair and unbiased in their treatment of teams and make decisions that improve the trust levels that exist. Anand Pillai, of HCL indicates that a manager is in control of his emotions, beliefs, value systems, and actions, determining his zone of control. If he can operate

in his sphere of control, without losing control, he can automatically increase his sphere of influence. Most employees wish to live in alignment with their values and it is up to their manager to create the environment in which they can do so. They find that there is something to learn in every moment and by remaining in touch with their inner selves even during trials, they are able to bring perspectives and a different presence to the challenge. The intentions and motives behind every decision made on behalf of a business, leadership and its employees, manifests into positive or negative consequences, based upon the purity with which such decisions are made. Organizations are spending large sums on development and motivation and trying to make the work environment more conducive to every need of fulfilment for the employees. When sincere and pure motives are combined with these external influences, the results could be the creation of vibrant and positive teams who then foster a spiritual climate. Spirituality in the workplace is more than a concept. It is a practical tool and method to foster success. If managers are able to tie personal abilities and attributes to the *spirit*, which is a driving force for interactions, behaviours and emotions, they can open channels for greater positive energy. We are all human beings with heart and souls. Everyone has different lives and issues and what unites us at the workplace is a common desire to do our best and contribute to the bettering of a greater community.

The demonstrative behavioural patterns that emerge from managers who are in synch with themselves, their purpose, their value systems, trust and fairness, and have a firm belief in what they define as ethical, can then cause a *spillover* effect as their spheres of influence widen. Their exemplary thought processes and straight behaviours, engineer action models and a set of operating practices that encourage people to remain true to their calling and value systems, judgment of right and wrong. The managers themselves may or may not be construed as idols by the rest of the team or the firm, but the pattern of behaviour or demonstrative actions that have emerged as a result of their beliefs of right or wrong, good and bad, creates a domino effect with teams and an environment that fosters signs of workplace spirituality is engineered. Our attitudes and entitlements are taken in a different meaning when we believe we are part of the culture that fosters spirituality. When workers are fully engaged, when they and their managers have common values and a shared sense of purpose, their daily work would be infused with deeper meaning which leads to satisfaction. As Fairholm (1996) stated; nourishing the spirit at work requires leaders to consider and respond to yet another dimension of human life beyond those commonly identified with leader-follower relationship. Teams begin forming action plans, and their behavioural patterns are crafted with the guidelines that emerge as a result of exemplary

behaviour and minute guidelines. Automatically strength of character emerges as they realize the synergies with their actions and their value systems. These situations engineer and foster a higher level of employee involvement in the workplace and more meaningful contribution. A higher sense of connectedness with the role emerges as the culture invokes a feeling of being in synch with values and ethics and the core of the person.

Workplace spirituality: Scope for further research

The purpose of this manuscript is to build support for the need to further research some important linkages between workplace spirituality and managerial values. For instance, what effect does a spiritual culture of an organization have on employees, and vice-versa, as they enter the organization? Three main components of ^{xvii}workplace spirituality; self-work immersion, interconnectedness, and meaning from work, have some level of general acceptance. Do these three components describe workplace spirituality equally, in all individuals, or is there some individual difference that accounts for the composition of these components?

Conclusion:

The exclusion of spirituality from workplace according to Ashforth and Pratt(2010), is a result of the industrial era wherein performance was a

measurable attribute, and the only determinant in the race for operational efficiency and maximization of profits. Workers were expected to check their brains at the door and come in as a physical input only with managers expected to do the thinking as a result of which a disparity and segmentation of labour began. Workers decided to bring in only part of themselves to the workplace and leave their real genuine self outside. However, in the present day service economy where people are expected to believe in their vocations and roles, and ensure they are able to put in a lot more than just physical output, the model of *not* nurturing the whole self at work is not sustainable. As a result researchers and consultants have developed newer organizational models which propagate bringing the whole self to work, especially as the focus is on increased personal experiences to customers (Ashish Pandey).

Lars Kolind,, Director Oticon, who was brought in to salvage the crises ridden Danish major Oticon in 1990 said, 'The key lies in the notion of trust. No one can resist trust'. Kolind rid the company of its bureaucratic restrictive ways and created a 'moral free space' for freedom of responsibility and working, subsequently recreating the lost magic of Oticon. You can't really coerce or mandate someone to be more honest or truthful or ethical in their behaviour, but you can truly inspire and sufficiently motivate through exemplary behaviour. Employees, who

believe they are truly trusted by their managers, will try to live up to those beliefs and are less likely to betray. According to Jurkiewicz and Giacalone (2004), organizations that welcomed workplace spirituality grew at faster rates, had higher rates of return, and increased their efficiencies more than comparative organizations who did not welcome workplace spirituality.

Notes

ⁱ Peter Pruzan, 'Leading with Wisdom'

ⁱⁱ Ashmos and Duchon, 2000

ⁱⁱⁱ Milliman, 1999

^{iv} Mitroff and Denton, 1999

^{vi} Nash 2001

^{vii} Mitroff and Denton 2005

^{viii} Neck and Milliman (1994, p. 9)

^{ix} Duchon and Plowman, 2005; Fry, 2003; Fry et al., 2005; Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003; Milliman et al., 2003

^x Gotsis and Kortezi, 2008, Ashmos and Duchon, 2000; Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003; Milliman et al., 2003

^{xi} Neal, 1997

^{xii} Schmidt-Wilk, Heaton, & Steingard, 2000

^{xiii} Pruzan, Peter, Leading with Wisdom, N.S. Raghavan, 58-59

^{xiv} McKee, Mills & Driscoll, 2000

^{xv} Pruzan, Peter, Leading with Wisdom; Stephen Covey

xvi Seidman, Dov. 'how'.
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