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Workplace Spirituality: An Employer-Employee Perspective

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Abstract:

A paradigm shift in the culture of the organization is seen all around the globe. Most of the organizations are hit by downsizing, reengineering, layoffs, competition and structural changes. The Hire & Fire policy of the private players is a new mantra that is unfurling in the industry resulting in a workforce that seeks something beyond the 9 to 5 work environment. Monetary incentives no longer attract the employees, they look for something beyond the pay checks. Workplace spirituality is the contemporary issue that is emerging in modern world organizations. Organizations are nurturing spiritual practices into their culture that is resulting in a committed workforce finding meaning in their work. The present paper outlines the concept of spirituality in the workplace and the growing interest of scholars, employees and organizations in this field. It helps understand the effects of spirituality in organization from the perspectives of employer and employee. At the employer level, workplace spirituality holds out potential to improve organization earning, performance & commitment. At the employee level, it gives employees a sense of identity, gives them capacity to care and tolerate and nurtures innovation and creativity. This paper also looks at how some companies in India are incorporating spirituality in the workplace.

Keywords: Spirituality, Committed workforce, Practices, Contemporary issue

1. Introduction

Today with the advent of 21st century, there's an emerging movement all around the world to bring spiritual and ethical values into business. Many employers no longer see the profit or hefty paychecks alone as the sole source of satisfaction in their work life. Instead now they value something more important than the monetary incentives i.e. The inner satisfaction and good quality work life. Work occupies an important place in the lives of the 21st century population. They derive satisfaction or sometimes a sense of discontentment from their work because of which they try to hoop from different organization in search of the inner peace. A poll published in *USA Today* found that 6 out of 10 people say workplaces would benefit from having a great sense of spirit in their work environment.

There is an on-going debate until today about what spirituality is with no single widely acceptable definition, since spirituality means different things to different people. The term "spirituality" comes from the Latin word "spiritus" or "spiritualis" that means breathing, breath, air or wind (Merriam Webster). Christina Puchalski, MD, Director of the George Washington Institute for Spirituality and Health, contends that "spirituality is the aspect of humanity that refers to the way individuals seek and express meaning and purpose and the way they experience their connectedness to the moment, to self, to others, to nature, and to the significant or sacred." Whereas workplace spirituality involves the effort to find one's ultimate purpose in life, to develop a strong connection to co-worker's and other people associated with work, and to have consistency or alignment between one's core beliefs and values of their organization (Mitroff and Denton, 1999).

People often use spirituality and religion interchangeably. This is something that is often misunderstood by many and is being confused with religion. Every religion does stresses that being a spiritual person is part of the faith but it is quite possible to be a spiritual person without being part of a religion or religious community. Spirituality more often than not, is talked of in the same breath as that of religion. But there is an underlying difference between the two terms.

Spirituality is much broader than religion. Spirituality allows the individual to possess a sense of the sacred without the institutional practices and limitations that are associated with traditional religion (Zinnbauer et al., 1999). Spirituality is not formal, structured or organized. Spirituality is inclusive, non-denominational and is less encumbered with the ideological baggage unlike religion, which is formal, denominational and exclusive having a particular set of practices and beliefs shared by the religious group. Spirituality has its essence in person's practice to get that sense of purpose and peace, developing beliefs and connection with others..

2. Literature Review

Mehta, Y., & Joshi, S. (2000) studied the importance of workplace spirituality to find and utilize the deepest inner resources from which comes the capacity to care and the power to tolerate and adapt with other employees at the workplace, to develop a clear and stable sense of identity as an individual in the context of shifting workplace relationships.

Singh, T. (2007) suggested that in order to face competition and perform well, spiritually oriented work environment and high spiritualism in individuals has become essential.

Moore, T. W. (2008) explained that workplace spirituality and diversity have real world impacts on inter-organizational relationships, creativity, innovation, efficiency, commitment, and job-satisfaction.

Rego, A. et al. (2008) analyzed that when people experience workplace spirituality, they feel more affectively attached to their organizations, experience a sense of obligation/loyalty towards them, and feel less instrumentally committed.

Marschke, E. et al. (2011) examined through the study that when people find meaning in their work activities and feel involved in a spiritual organizational climate, they become happier and healthy employees engaged in a collaborative manner, to apply the full potential to work and bring their entire selves to the organization. They, thus become more productive over the long run compared with employees in organizations where spirituality is ignored or disrespected.

Attri, R. (2012) explained the ripple effect within the spiritual worker that starts with the internal changes and expands through "connection with empathizing colleagues" to "team performance, which is expressed in increased support, elevated trust, and enhanced understanding," ultimately leading to "a greater degree of responsibility and ownership, as well as awareness of the bigger picture." The outcomes to this sequence include greater output, better organizational performance, and increased job satisfaction.

Pathak, D. (2012) found that a spiritual workplace provides resources to help people uncover their creative potential and to practice creativity within the organization. Spiritual organization respects and values individuals' experiences and includes individuals who bring appropriate skill sets to a particular job.

Ajala, E.M. (2013) investigated through regression analysis that when people work with a committed spirit they can find a kind of meaning and purpose, a kind of fulfillment in the workplace and their spiritual level will not only reduce stress, conflict, and absenteeism, but also enhance wellbeing, quality of life and work performance.

Ashraf, S., et al. (2014) explained that there is a positive relationship between workplace spirituality, job satisfaction, organizational commitment and job involvement.

Aravamudhan, N. R. et al. (2015) studied that engaging the employees through pay, intellect and mind would not work anymore. Companies understand the need to inculcate spiritual values of the organization to engage the souls of employees to be able to stay relevant.

Afsar & Rehman (2015) suggested that workplace spirituality inculcates past practices of interconnectivity and a feeling of trust between individuals, who are a part of a particular work process, which subsequently instigate cooperative feelings and lead to an overall organizational culture that is driven by motivation, exemplified by a positive response, and unanimity and harmony among the individuals, consequently, uplifting the cumulative performance of the individuals, and in turn aiding to the organizational excellence as a whole.

Pawar, B. S. (2016) established that workplace spirituality has a positive relationship with emotional, psychological, social, and spiritual well-being.

3. Objectives

1. To understand the emerging role of spirituality at the workplace
2. To study the effects of spirituality on employer & employee
3. To analyse spirituality practices in companies in India

4. Workplace Spirituality- A Concept

Workplace spirituality is a growing movement all over the world. The hunger to find the inner peace & personal meaning is in capitulating most of the organizations. It becomes a lot more important for the organisations to understand this growing movement of spirituality and incorporate spiritual practices to gain an imperative edge over the competitors, improve the employee attrition rate, to produce a committed workforce and in turn this improves the overall performance of the organisation in the market. A study done by Mckinsey in Australia found the productivity perking up and turnover reduced, when the company incorporated spiritual tools in programmes conducted for the employees.

In many of today's organizations, people only bring their arms and brains to work, not their souls (Mitroff, 2003). The consequence is that organizations do not trigger the full creativity and potential of their employees. Employees, in turn, do not succeed in developing themselves as holistic human beings. Layoffs, increased employee turnover hitting the organization which in turn leads to a workforce that is not committed to their organization and an increased cost of recruitment and training & development. Key factors that have led to a surge in this trend include:

1. The ever looming threat of hire and fire policies has made employees feel jittery and insecure at work. Employee productivity has nosedived. Employees are wilting under the groan of stress and poor mental health resulting in absenteeism and work life imbalances (Schor, 1993; HRDC, 1997)
2. Mergers and acquisitions destroyed the psychological contract that workers had a job for life. This led some people to search for more of a sense of inner security rather than looking for external security from a corporation

3. If inappropriately managed, workplace spirituality may imbue organizational structures with spiritual qualities that serve as a new technology of control, i.e. As new and more sophisticated forms of domination (Driver,2005;Cunhaetal.,2006).
4. If correctly interpreted, workplace spirituality (i.e. Workplace opportunities to perform meaningful work in the context of a community with a sense of joy and personal fulfilment) can mitigate and/or remove what several authors have pointed out as allegedly present in many modern organizations injuries to employee mental health, vassalage, people humiliation and destruction, dehumanized practices and serious threats to the “human soul” (Hancock, 1997; Brown, 2003; Mitroff, 2003).
5. Organizations are a great human achievement, and work is the centerpiece of most people’s lives and inextricably impregnated in people’s search for ultimate meaning (Mitroff, 2003)

4.1. The Different Types of Spirituality

1. *Mystical spirituality* – One has the desire to go beyond this materialistic world, the senses and ego. With this kind of spirituality, one is focused on having a sense of unity with everything.
2. *Authoritarian spirituality* – It is based on the need to have rules and definitions. This is often seen in some religious practices around the world.
3. *Intellectual spirituality* – One is focused on having the knowledge and spiritual understanding by studying history and theories related to spirituality. This is normally found in theology.
4. *Service spirituality* –The foundation of this spirituality is serving others and is commonly seen in many forms of religion.
5. *Social security* – Social support is an important part of spirituality and is commonly used by people who get a spiritual feeling when they are with other people.

5. Research Methodology

The present research makes use of available secondary data from various journals, research papers and other online resources keeping in view of the set objectives.

From the organization stand point, spirituality in the workplace refers to an organizational culture supported by mission statements, leadership and business practices that are socially responsible and value-driven, that acknowledges the contributions that employees make and that supports personal spiritual development and wellbeing (Ashmos and Duchon, 2000; Guillory, 2000; Mitroff and Denton, 1999). From an individual perspective, spirituality at work can be defined as “the recognition that employees have an inner life that is nourished by meaningful work, which takes place in the context of community” (Ashmos and Duchon, 2000). A careful analysis of these definitions reveals that the common thread of finding meaning and making a contribution through work, serving others, Connectedness and authenticity at work as a leitmotif of workplace spirituality.

The Centre of Visionary Leadership, has said that Spirituality has both vertical and horizontal aspects. Vertically it is connected to the universe and horizontally it relates to family, co-workers and humanity as a whole.

Literature review has been used as a foundation in this research and the conceptual framework is built to describe the effects of spirituality in the workplace.

In order to study the impact of incorporating spirituality, the organization is cut halved from the following two perspectives:

1. Employer
2. Employee

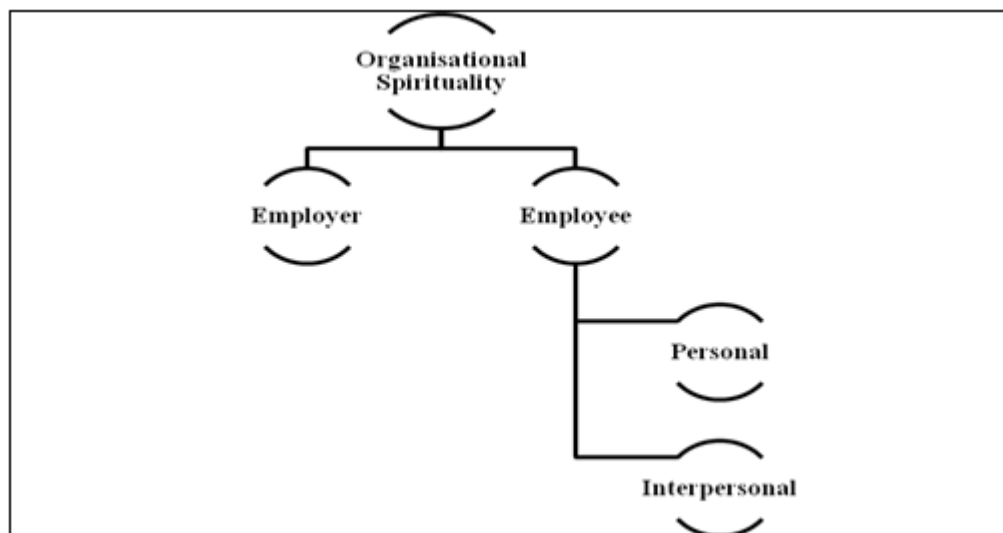


Figure 1: Spirituality Perspectives in an Organsiation

5.1. Employer

The effect of including spiritual practices on the employer:

- *Organizational Performance & Commitment*

An organization must become sensitive to its workers personal lives and beliefs in order to increase job productivity and reduce turnover rates. A company must first understand what it means for an employee to express him or herself spiritually and it involves the assumptions that each person has his or her own inner motivations and truths and desires to be involved in activities that give greater meaning to his or her life and the lives of others (Ashmos and Duchon, 2000). Spirituality can be used to improve organizational performance (Ashmos and Duchon, 2000; Garcia-Zamor, 2003; Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003a; Fry, 2005); and spirituality research should demonstrate spirituality's links with productivity and profitability (Ashmos and Duchon, 2000; Giacalone, Jurkiewicz and Fry, 2005; Fry, 2005; Garcia-Zamor, 2003; Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003a and 2003b).

- *Earning Capacity*

It has been suggested that organizations that encourage spirituality experiences improved their organizational performance and profitability (Biberman and Whitty, 1997; Biberman et al., 1999; Burack, 1999; Kriger and Hanson, 1999; Korac-Kakabadse, Kouzmin, and Kakabadse, 2002; Neck and Milliman, 1994; Thompson, 2000). Additional research reveals that organizations that have voluntary spirituality programs have had higher profits and success (Dehler and Welsh, 1994; Mitroff and Denton, 1999b; Konz and Ryan, 1999; Turner, 1999).

5.2. Employee

To study the effects of including spiritual practices in the organization two perspectives has been taken from an employee point of view, one at personal level and the other one is at the interpersonal level.

5.2.1. Personal

- *Meaning & Purpose at Work*

Work takes new meaning and significance when it is seen as a calling, a sacred duty, a service opportunity or a way to serve God, other deities, or a higher purpose (Paloutzian, Emmons & Keortge, 2003). Therefore, when work is seen as a calling, it becomes more meaningful and subsequent increase in productivity and commitment of employees (Paloutzian et al. 2003; Reave, 2005). Their finding confirms that productivity and performance increases as a result of deeper meaning at work, as well as how spirituality at work can provide employees a sense of meaning and purpose. Many employees in today's workplaces question themselves and their work, ask themselves about the essence and meaning of their work and search for a sense of purpose and meaning at work (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Cacioppe, 2000; Karakas, 2010). Researches have shown that workplace spirituality has the potential to provide employees a feeling of purpose, a sense of connection, and a sense of meaning at work (Brandt, 1996; Bolman & Deal, 1995; Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003).

- *Innovation & Creativity*

Organizations with a stronger sense of spirituality enable employees to exercise stronger values and ethical beliefs in their workplace and empower them to show more creativity and flexibility at work (Mitroff & Denton, 1999).

5.2.2. Interpersonal

- *The Capacity to Care & Power to Tolerate*

Workplace spirituality is focused on the theme of tolerance, patience, the feel of interconnectivity, purpose and acceptability of the mind to the norms of the organization, integrated together to shape personal values (Afsar & Rehman, 2015). The presence of Workplace Spirituality (WPS) dimensions in the organization will help workers be more tolerated and patient toward working environment, there will be less stress, and high commitment to their work as well as to the organization. With the help of this, an organization can retain its best-performing workers. (Misbah Hassan, Ali Bin Nadeem and Asma Akhter. 2016)

- *Interconnectedness & Collaboration*

The spiritual component of interconnectedness can generally be defined as a feeling of being part of something greater than self, yet interdependent (Mitroff & Denton, 1999). The major components of spirituality are meaningful work, purposeful work, sense of community/interconnectedness and transcendence (Petchsawanga & Duchon, 2012). Spirituality at work provides employees a sense of community and connectedness through higher levels of employee attachment, loyalty and belonging (Duchon & Plowman, 2005; Fairholm, 1996; Milliman, Ferguson, Trickett and Condemi, 1999). Spirituality is linked to positive outcomes and benefits associated with a sense of community through building community (Cavanagh, Hanson, Hanson & Hinojoso, 2001)

6. Companies Incorporating Spirituality into Their Work Environment

According to Swami Vivekananda,

“The search for the purpose of human existence has two aspects — external and internal. While the external aspect keeps changing, the internal aspect is constant. Rituals and methods of worship, as external aspects, keep changing, but spirituality is the inner core. It is constant, it does not change.”

Companies are inculcating practices to turn the organization into a spiritual workplace. Some forms of encouragement of spirituality in the workplace include organizing optional morning prayers or yoga sessions; designing multi-faith prayer spaces; starting corporate chaplaincies, or introducing spiritual wellness and balance programs for employees (Krishnakumar and Neck, 2002; Mitroff and Denton, 1999)

In India, organizations have embraced workplace spirituality. Spiritual organizations are concerned with helping employees develop and reach their potential.

Various training programs are conducted such as the Art of Living Program, Transcendental Meditation, Vipassana meditation in companies like American Express, Citibank. Some corporations incorporate spirituality into their strategies within the framework of corporate social responsibility. For example, Anita Roddick, founder of the Body Shop, is committed to contributing to Glasgow through social responsibility projects aimed at solving the problems of high unemployment, crime rates and urban decay in the region. She invests a quarter of net profits back to the community to 'keep the soul of the company alive'. Many companies that are grounded in spiritual values and principles also are committed to social responsibility and community service.

Nicholas Piramal India Ltd. Located in Mumbai, provides spiritual guidance to its employees by incorporating prayer into routine work functions, providing yoga and meditation and allowing employees of all religions the expression of their own spiritual beliefs. They have demonstrated commitment to the community by establishing programs to help empower women, teach the poor and nurture people's health in significant ways.

Companies like Aarti International Ltd., Reckit and Coleman, Wipro, Dabur, Tata Tea, Excel Industries and The Times of India have implemented specific policies, programs, or practices that explicitly nurture spirituality inside their organizations.

To empower the employees and to fulfill their personal and professional dreams Hindustan Unilever & Kotak Mahindra offers simple, everyday conveniences that make life easier, richer and more joyful. Along with health insurance and hospitalization insurance for employees and their family, the company also has recreational facilities like mediation room, yoga classes and a well - stocked library. Employees at HCL Info systems are regarded very much important as they consider that key to customer satisfaction lies with employee satisfaction. They have an employee focused program called 'Employees First' that gives employees whatever they need to succeed - be it space to grow, time to think or tools to use. It's about maximizing personal potential rather than scrutinizing professional performance. They ensure that people are given Support, Knowledge, Recognition, Empowerment, and Transformation.

Pizza Hut, hires chaplains to guide employees who are struggling with personal problems and by doing this they have reduced the employee turnover rate by 50 percent.

Employees at Wipro are encouraged to be a part of different Corporate Social Responsibility campaign under the banner 'Wipro Cares'. 'Mitr', Wipro's counseling initiative, help employees to cope with crises faced in their personal and professional life.

7. Findings & Conclusions

Organizations in the 21st century should understand the importance of spirituality and should not confuse this term with religious practices. The strained relationship between the employees and employers or employees and employees or employer and employer resulting in a workplace that is leaving the organizations in search of the inner peace. So, to save the cost on recruitment and also to increase the overall productivity of the organization the company should inculcate and nurture spiritual values and practices in some form or the other. When done properly, spirituality at work enhances the overall value of the organization.

8. Recommendations and Suggestions

Meditation, retreat or spiritual training time set aside for employees, appropriate accommodation of employee, prayer practices, converting some rooms and meeting spaces to provide lavender-scented quiet spaces with calming lighting, events focusing on wellness in body, mind, and spirit or may be professionally hired chaplains to guide employees who are struggling with personal problems and openly simply asking questions to test if the company's actions are aligned with higher meaning and purpose are some practices that the organisations if incorporate into their culture would lead to meaning and purpose in the work and organisation.

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