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Workplace Spirituality: Linkages with Attitude, Mental Health, Leadership, Organizational Development, Earning Management, Stress and Wellbeing

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Abstract:

Spirituality has gained popularity in recent couple of years and has become an important subject for discussions in talks, seminars and conferences. Corporate, researchers, academicians have recognized and accepted the significance of individual spirituality and spirituality at work. No one can deny and ignore the importance of spirituality for an individual, community, society and the organizations, which is why it has become an objective for researchers to explore. The purpose of this paper is to provide insights to the readers as to what spirituality is, and why is it important. The other purpose is to study and examine its linkages with stress, attitude and values, mental health due to depression, anxiety and trauma, at an individual or personal level. Another purpose of this study is to examine its linkages with leadership, earning management & ethical decision making and organizational development at organizational level.

Keywords: *Workplace Spirituality, attitude, mental health, spiritual leadership, organizational development, earning management, Stress and wellbeing*

1. Introduction

Interest in spirit, spirituality, and spiritual phenomenon has been recently grown since 20th century. Workplace spirituality has become a budding concern for the large number of organization and employees these days. Lot of articles and books, corporate and academic, workshops are accepting the positive role of spirituality towards improvement of organizations, markets and economies, the society and thereby the nation. It has also been accepted that people inclined towards spirituality are more ethical in business, and therefore, are of more significance to the organizations. Spiritual organizations are more concerned with helping employees develop and reach their potentials. Therefore, workplace spirituality is all about individuals and organizations looking at work as a spiritual path, as a break to contribute to society in a meaningful way.

Spirituality is a word used in various contexts that means different for different people at different times in different cultures. People sometimes relate spirituality with religion. The term "Spirituality" is undoubtedly a broader construct than religion. Spirituality is concerned with having a sense of the sacredness without getting into the institutional practices and various limitations that are associated with and posed by traditional religion (Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Scott, 1999). But at the same time we really cannot completely isolate spirituality from religion. It has been observed most of the time that religious individuals are more spiritual. Their strong and firm belief is obviously a part of traditional religiousness like regular prayer, going to church etc. They are also spiritual as they are part of an individual's search for the sacred (Hill, 2000).

2. Workplace Spirituality Defined

While there are numerous definitions given by thinkers about workplace spirituality, most of the definitions (e.g. Ashmos and Duchon, 2000; Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003; Milliman, 2003) revolve around the dimensions of meaning in work and community at work. The terms used by these thinkers and scholars may be in distinct forms such as purpose, belongingness, membership, and connectedness. One of such definitions of workplace spirituality is been given by Ashmos and Duchon (2000) "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". Ashmos and Duchon (2000), Milliman (2003) and other studies specify workplace spirituality at three levels: individual level in terms of meaning in work, group level in terms of sense of community, and organizational level in terms of alignment with organizational values. Milliman (2003) conceptualized alignment with organizational values as the organizational level aspect of workplace spirituality. Milliman (1999) also identified an organization's adoption of a "cause" as one aspect of organizational spirituality. Similar has been specified by Mitroff (1994) while outlining the features of future organizations, as "by discussing the spiritual sides of organizations . . . we are talking about the greater moral obligation of every organization to contribute to the solutions of world problems".

Widely accepted latest research by various eminent researchers (Duchon and Plowman, 2005; Fry, 2003; Fry et al., 2005; Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003; Milliman et al., 2003) suggests that workplace spirituality is a reflection of employee experiences such as a sense of meaning, purpose, community, and transcendence at the workplace. Though lot of work has been done, still workplace spirituality research is in its early stage (Dent, 2005; Duchon and Plowman, 2005; Sheep, 2006). Researches on Spirituality are been for in various dimensions. Some researches are primarily focused on defining and operationalizing workplace spirituality (e.g. Ashmos and Duchon, 2000; Moore and Casper, 2006), some on mapping the area of workplace spirituality research and some on laying of guidelines for the research in workplace spirituality and outlining methodologies for studying workplace spirituality (e.g. Benefiel, 2003; Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003; Lund Dean, 2003; Tischler et al., 2007). Some researchers have studied leadership as a mechanism for facilitating workplace spirituality (e.g. Fry, 2003, 2005). Researchers have also come out with outcomes of workplace spirituality such as employee work attitudes, (e.g. Kolodinsky, 2008; Milliman 2003; Rego and Pina e Cunha, 2008), organizational productivity (Fry 2005), and work unit performance (Duchon and Plowman, 2005). On the other side, a number of researchers have tried to relate spirituality with mental health (Swinton 2001; Fosskett 2004)

3. Workplace Spirituality Linked with Leadership and Organization Development

Workplace Spirituality has been linked with leadership and organizational development from quite a few years. Servant and spiritual leadership are the widely known examples. These leadership theories have gain popularity to an extent that these are now been taught in almost all business schools.

In a recent research on spiritual leadership (Fry, 2003, 2005; Fry et al., 2005), a specific form of leadership called “spiritual leadership” has been found to have linkages with the outcomes such as calling and membership, which are also similar to that of the meaning and community aspects of workplace spirituality. This research in a way suggests that workplace spirituality is an outcome spiritual leadership. Again, French and Bell (2001) suggest that spirituality, or what we call the aspect of community, also occupy a special place in organization development (OD) efforts. Adding to this, a very recent paper (Pawar, 2008) has shown clear linkages of workplace spirituality with leadership and organization development.

4. Workplace Spirituality Linked with Values and Attitudes

Lot of empirical research work has been suggesting linkages between workplace spirituality and Values and Attitudes. Many researchers have found spirituality to be putting a positive impact on workers’ commitment. Ahiauzu & Asawo (2010) proved that a culture of altruistic love has led to a higher level of commitment among employees. Various other researchers (Bodia & Ali, 2012), (Chawla & Guda, 2010), (Hong, 2012), (Markow & Klenke, 2005), (Marschke et al. 2009), (Milliman et al. 2003), (Rego et al. 2007) have also reported a positive influence of spirituality on employee commitment.

Not just on workers commitment, but, workplace spirituality also has a positive impact on job satisfaction (Altat & Awan, 2011), (Bodia & Ali, 2012), (Chawla & Guda, 2010), (Clark et al. 2007), (Milliman et al. 2003), (Robert et al. 2006).

Other than business or corporate world, spirituality has also been studied in defense people. It has been always a question for researchers that why and how are the commitment and motivational level so high among soldiers! Clemmons & Fields (2011) studied soldiers and found that motivation in soldiers was a result of their personal spirituality. A very recent research by Chand & Koul (2012) proposed that spirituality helped workers cope with work related stress. Chen (2011) found that a leader’s self-perception in terms of spiritual values was not predictive of subordinate motivational autonomy.

5. Workplace Spirituality Linked with Earning Management and Ethical Decision Making

Workplace spirituality has also been found very significant in controlling earning management and inspiring managers towards ethical decision making.

Earnings management actually means the use of accounting techniques to fabricate financial reports in such a way that may cover an excessively positive picture of a company’s business activities and financial position.

Fernando and Jackson (2006) revealed that workplace spirituality leads to better judgment and decision making in leaders. Also, Kaplan (2001) proposed that intentions of earnings management among managers in financial accounting are directly related to the internal values of leaders. Some more studies on earnings management also suggested that workplace spirituality plays an important role in minimizing a manager’s motivation to manipulate financial reports (Bhunja & Das, 2012), (Ming-Chia, 2012). Giacalone & Jurkiewica (2003) also found that spirituality influences business practice in an ethical way. Another study from Issa & Peck (2010) found that spirituality is closely associated with ethical practice at the workplace.

6. Spirituality Linked With Stress, Wellbeing and Ill-Being

A good number of previous research works have been done on spirituality, life or work stress and health. Individual spirituality has prominently been considered to be a predictor of better health and also lower levels of stress, especially when talk about spirituality in non-religious terms. Since many years, studies have been proving individual spirituality to be a moderator in the relationship between stress, wellbeing and ill-being (e.g., Elam 2000; Hong 2008; Youngmee & Seidlitz 2002).

Based on Lazarus and Folkmans original transactional model, Gall (2005) proposed a conceptual model to explain the role spirituality in stress and health. He proposed that spirituality is the best stress coping mechanism that could be used at the personal level (in terms of beliefs), primary and secondary appraisal level (in terms of spiritual appraisal), at behavior level (in terms of self-reflection), connection level (in terms of interconnectedness), and meaning-making (in terms of spiritual reappraisal) to cope with stressors.

In the same series, Calicchia & Graham (2006) have proposed a moderating model between individual spirituality, stress and wellbeing. Calicchia and Graham (2006) suggested that the influence of stress on wellbeing was affected by an individual's internal factors (such as intelligence, past experience and coping strategies) and external factors (such as social support and occupation). Calicchia and Graham took Gall et al. (2005) spiritual appraisal model as base or foundation to further investigate moderation models. Youngmee and Seidlitz (2002) studied spirituality in college students to examine whether spirituality affect the stress level and its impact on wellbeing and ill-being (positive and negative affect and physical adjustment). They found that spirituality is closely associated with stress and has impact on wellbeing and ill-being. Similarly, Ellison (1991) explored the role of religious spirituality and found that spirituality has very significant role in lowering down the harmful effects of traumatic stress on wellbeing.

7. Spirituality Linked with Mental Health

The relationship between spirituality and mental health has been explored several times in different ways. Researchers have tried to explore this relation in distinct disciplines, such as psychology, psychiatry, theology, nursing and gerontology (Abela, Brozina, Seligman, 2004; Ai, Peterson, Bolling, Koenig, 2002; Ai and Park, 2005; Baetz, Griffin, Bowen, Koenig, Marcoux, 2004; Foskett, Roberts, Mathews, Macmin, Cracknell; Nicholls, 2004; Fehring, Miller, and Shaw, 1997).

7.1. Spirituality and Depression

We all know that depression is the most common mental health problem experienced by people. The symptoms include feelings of misery, sadness, unexplained tiredness and fatigue, loss of appetite for food and work, excessive worry, feeling like if failed, unrealistic feelings of guilt, worthlessness or hopelessness, sleep disorders and physical symptoms such as back pain or stomach cramps (Mental Health Foundation, 2006)

Since most of the people are suffering due to depression, researchers have speedily started exploring the relationship between spirituality and mental. Swinton (2001) interviewed six people who were into depression for two years, and emphasized on the importance of spirituality and concluded that depression which is generally characterized by feelings of hopelessness, lack of meaning or purpose in life and low self-esteem, is linked with spirituality. Burnard (1990) has explored that spiritual care enables people to cope depression.

It has been observed that when depression leads people to struggle intellectually with their faith, the elements and traditions like worship and prayers are able to "carry a person through" their worst moments.

Research by Koenig, George and Peterson (1998) found that for every 10-point increase in a person's intrinsic religiosity, there was 70% recovery from depressive symptoms after physical illness.

Similar findings came out from researches done by researchers (Seligman, Abramson, Semmel, and Von 1979; Richards, Owens, and Stein, 1993; Seligman 2000) on those who believe in a transcendent being or higher power and who belong to a community which share their values and offer support.

7.2. Spirituality and PTSD

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is understood as a delayed reaction to an abnormal, traumatic life experience like war, terrorism, accident, a natural disaster, or any kind of physical, emotional or psychological abuse (Niles 1991). The study found that spirituality is considered to be very helpful to people in times of crisis, trauma and grief. A recent systematic review of articles in the Journal of Traumatic Stress also observed similar results (Weaver, Flannelly, Garbarino, Figley, and Flannelly, 2003).

8. Conclusion

Spirituality, whether in an individual or at workplace, has a vital role to play for an individual, community, society and organization as a whole. Spirituality, when present in an individual, can help him build a positive attitude with high values. It helps develop an employee into a better human being, leader and a manager. It minimizes stress level of an individual and improves job satisfaction. It also helps an individual to come out of worldly sufferings and pains, distress and anxiety, depressions and mental disorders. Spirituality when linked with religion gives birth to a strong and better citizen who always believes in helping others, and giving back to society. In the organizations, it helps build a better culture, a positive and healthy environment, good leadership, better and ethical decision making. These in turn would lead to holistic organizational development. Spirituality has been able to contribute towards the community, society and the organizations in a meaningful way.

9. References

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