
Workplace Spirituality: A New Dimension in Understanding Employees Behaviour

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ABSTRACT

Workplace spirituality is a new dimension in management studies and research approaches towards this field are still evolving. Workplace spirituality is not about organized religious practices, not about god or theology rather it recognizes that people have an inner life that nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work in the context of community. Organizations that promotes spirituality or a spiritual culture recognizes that people have both mind and spirit, they seek to find meaning and purpose in their work, and have a desire to connect with other human beings and be a part of community. Various concepts ranging from job design to transformational leadership well matches to the concept of organization spirituality.

Organisational behaviour is a field, which investigates the impact that individuals, groups and structures have on behaviour within organization. As OB improves our understanding of the emotions and behaviours of employees, the same way awareness of spirituality can help us better understand employee behaviour in twenty first century. The concept of spirituality in the organization is progressing widely and includes topics such as stress management, value and ethics, motivation, leadership and work-life balance. The interest in spirituality has grown because of- Contemporary lifestyles such as single-parent families, geographic mobility, temporary nature of jobs etc. increases the need for involvement and connection, desire to integrate personal life values with one's professional life, strong sense of purpose in the job, trust, respect etc, all contributes for a spiritual focus in the organization.

Today, employees spend most of their waking time at work with their co-workers and colleagues, they seek meaning and purpose in their work as their social identity is derived from what kind of work they do and with which type of organisation they are attached to. This shift in consciousness is giving impetus to workplace spirituality. Workplace spirituality has been described from both organizational and individual point of view. Organizational perspective defines it as a "framework of organizational values evidenced in the culture, facilitating their sense of being connected to others in a way that provides feeling of completeness and joy". From individuals point of view workplace spirituality requires " finding ultimate purpose in life, developing connection with others, and having alignment with organizational values."

OBJECTIVE

The objective of paper is to discuss what workplace spirituality is and how does it help in understanding employees behaviour , the various concepts associated with it and the dimensions of workplace spirituality.

PAPER TYPE

The nature of the paper is purely conceptual and informative.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is purely theoretical and analytical in nature, mainly based on secondary data. The data has been collected from various research papers and books on Organizational behaviour.

INTRODUCTION

Spirituality at workplace is a fame-gaining concept in modern times. It is not about organized religious practices, not about god or theology rather it recognizes that people have an inner life that nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work in the context of community. This concept is gaining currency because of various reasons, and the major reason is the huge ethical failures of reputed organizations such as Enron, Satyam computers, Arthur Anderson, WorldCom etc. Various research studies have proved that ethical/spiritual organizations perform very well financially. Linking ethical practices and profitability has made people look at the relevance of spirituality for business organizations from fresh perspective.

Spirituality at workplace is gaining credence throughout the world. A lot of literature has been published which has tried to explain and study the interrelationship between spirituality and business. Ethics, Social responsibility, Philanthropy, and other finer human values have always been favoured due to increasing unscrupulous economic activities in society. It is imperative to note that spirituality is not a religion. Religion is specifically understood under the frame of a particular God. It is formalization of beliefs of a particular community in one supreme power. Spirituality is much more broader than Religion. They are interrelated but spirituality has a wider base than religion. The Webster dictionary defines Spirituality as **heavenly-mindedness**. It is an experience of depth in life; it is living life with heart rather than just living it superficially.

Organizations that promotes spirituality or a spiritual culture recognizes that people have both mind and spirit, they seek to find meaning and purpose in their work, and have a desire to connect with other human beings and be a part of community. Various concepts ranging from job design to transformational leadership well matches to the concept of organization spirituality.

WORKPLACE SPIRITUALITY: THE CONCEPT

Spirituality at the workplace has found increasing mention since the 1990s. **Giacalone and Jurkiewicz** define workplace spirituality in their *Handbook of Workplace Spirituality and Organizational Performance* as “a framework of organizational values evidenced in the culture that promotes employees’ experience of transcendence through the work process, facilitating their sense of being connected in a way that provides feelings of compassion and joy.”

This new emerging paradigm, Workplace Spirituality in organization has also been called as the *spirituality movement*. Ashmos and Duchon (2000) have described the spirituality movement as “a major transformation” (p. 134) where organizations make room for the spiritual dimension, which has to do with meaning, purpose, and a sense of community. This new spiritual dimension

embodies employees' search for simplicity, meaning, self-expression, and interconnectedness to something higher (Marques, Dhiman, and King, 2007).

Contemporary lifestyles such as single-parent families, geographic mobility, temporary nature of jobs etc. increases the need for involvement and connection, desire to integrate personal life values with one's professional life, strong sense of purpose in the job, trust, respect etc, all contributes for a spiritual focus in the organization. Topics ranging from job design (designing work that is meaningful to employees) to transformational leadership (leadership practice that emphasize a higher-order purpose and self transcendent goal) are well matched to the concept of organizational spirituality.

SPIRITUAL ORGANIZATION: FEATURES

Workplace spirituality is a concept, which involves topics such as values, ethics, motivation, leadership and work-life balance, stress and stress management. Spiritual organizations are those, which help its people to develop and reach their full potential. Spirituality concerned organizations directly address work-related conflicts or problems, which arise out of work-life conflicts. What differentiates a spiritual organization from a non-spiritual one is still on the level of preliminary research, but there are some notable features, which creates difference:

- ❖ **Strong Sense of Purpose:** Profits are important for any organization to survive and earn more goodwill but spiritual organizations build their culture around a meaningful purpose because purpose is important for the people to be inspired and to create a sense of DO WHAT YOU BELIEVE.
- ❖ **Trust and Respect:** "LIES AREN'T ETHICAL". Since childhood, we have been taught this. It goes to spiritual organizations as well. They are characterized by mutual trust and respect, honesty and openness. Managers are not afraid to admit mistakes. Spiritual organizations are specific and honest about their product, its quality and suitability.
- ❖ **Humanistic Work Practices:** Flexi-timing or flexible work schedules, group and organizational based rewards, narrowing of pay status and differentials, guarantees of individual work rights, employee empowerment, and job-security are some amongst many humanistic practices which are followed by spiritual organizations.
- ❖ **Toleration of Employee Expression:** Spiritual Organizations never stifle with employees emotions; they let their people speak without any guilt or fear of reprimand. They allow people to be themselves. Spiritual organizations encourage employees to express their sense of humour on the job, to act spontaneously and to make their work fun.

CONCEPTS/THEORIES RELATED WITH WORKPLACE SPIRITUALITY

Fairholm (2011) has described the evolution of leadership techniques in terms of generations:

- ❖ **First generation:** Focused on who the leader is?, i.e. his traits and qualities (The Great Man Theory, Charismatic Leadership).
- ❖ **Second generation:** What leaders do? (Behavioral Theories)

- ❖ **Third generation:** Where leadership happens? (Contingency Theory and Situational Theory)
- ❖ **Fourth generation:** What leaders think about, value, and what they do? (Transactional Leadership, Transformational Leadership, Principle-centred and Servant leadership and Moral Leadership etc.)

Recognition and attention paid to leadership was majorly after 1980 as an influencing process. Another aspect of the 1980s was an increased focus on morals and values in relation to leadership. Many proposed leadership approaches and definitions using terms such as strategic, visionary, connective, authentic, spiritual, responsible, adaptive, and principle centered emerged during 1990s and 2000s

- ❖ **Fifth generation:** *Spiritual leadership.*

Following are the areas where recognition of inner life, meaningful work, and Community in the workplace contribute.

- Organizational Performance
- Positive relationships among the qualities of spiritual leadership and Organizational Productivity and commitment;
- Increased physical and mental health of employees, advanced personal growth, and enhanced sense of self worth;
- Relationship between spirituality dimensions and organization commitment, and individual intention to quit, intrinsic work satisfaction, job involvement, and organization based self esteem; and
- Sustained purpose, culture, and identity can transcend and enhance an organization's performance and success.

“Workplace spirituality is a framework of organizational values evidenced in the culture that promote employees’ experience of transcendence, facilitating their sense of being connected to others in a way that provides feelings of completeness and joy.” (Krahnke, Giacalone, & Jurkiewicz, 2003)

The theory and concept stated above helps in understanding the concept of workplace spirituality even better and helps in gaining insights in understanding employees behaviour.

DIMENSIONS OF WORKPLACE SPIRITUALITY

Trusteeship:

Prominent followers of trusteeship have been Jamnalal Bajaj, Pirojsha Godrej, and GD Birla. Until today, these names evoke trust and respect in the minds of Indian Consumer. Trust and respect are very prominent features of a spiritual organization and these names of Birla and Godrej have earned respect and goodwill globally due to their humanistic work practices and their loyalty towards their customers.

Ethics:

- Transparency in the conduct of business.

- Fixed price from every customer
- True information to customers and stakeholders
- No unfair business practices
- No discrimination amongst employees

WIPRO Corporation and Infosys ltd, both IT giants have always promoted ethical values in their organizational culture.

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY:

Refers to business responsibility towards society or social welfare. Business takes all their resources from the society so in turn, they have to return it to the people and they do it by CSR. A very good example in this regard is the Indian tobacco giant ITC's e-choupal venture, which aims to provide internet access to farmers in remote villages.

Wealth should not be an aim in itself; rather it should be a means for reaching higher goals. Business who believe in this and incorporates it will definitely survive in long run.

Above-mentioned ones are the major dimension around which the concept of workplace spirituality evolves. Apart from these the other dimensions are:

- Motivation
- Corporate Governance
- Mutual trust and respect
- Honesty and integrity
- Sense of belongingness
- Meaningful work
- Transcendence of self
- Interconnectedness
- Holistic growth and development
- Alignment with organizational values

WORKPLACE SPIRITUALITY: SOME EXAMPLES

- ❖ **Larsen & Toubro's** social initiatives cover multiple locations around India. In Vadodara, its corporate social initiative cell has been working towards reducing malnutrition in and around the city since 2006. L&T has worked with 137 integrated child development service personnel; designed education and, communication material for expecting mothers; conducted health check-up; and imparted health care education through Mamta Divas along with government of Gujarat. L&T employees were encouraged to volunteer for all these programmes so that they might experience the joy of helping others
- ❖ Organizations like **Starbucks** and **Aravind** eye care encourages their employees to pray or spend time in the meditation room- encouraging more spiritual culture.
- ❖ **Excel Industries** an industry leader in the area of agricultural chemicals and agricultural chemical intermediaries has constantly innovated to help with social problems. For e.g. it has

come up with the technology to convert garbage into usable bio-fertilizer. These efforts have lead the employees to work hard and be committed to keep the organization afloat even during the most difficult economic times.

SCOPE FOR FUTURE WORK

The critics of spirituality movement in the organizations have focussed on various issues such as:

- ❖ Does workplace Spirituality has a scientific foundation. What really is Workplace Spirituality? Is it just a management buzzword?
- ❖ Are spiritual organizations legitimate? If speak specifically, do organizations carry the right to impose spiritual values on their employees?
- ❖ Are spirituality and profits compatible?

Research on workplace spirituality is very less so far, although Spirituality has been defined very broadly in some sources. These criticisms in it are interesting questions that can be answered by conducting studies/research. These questions give scope to further research on the topic.

CONCLUSION

Workplace Spirituality is an evolving concept. It is directly proportional to long term profits and gains. In this present competitive era, organization needs to incorporate humanistic practices and spiritual values in order to enable human hearts and spirit to grow and flourish. Indi has made many contributions to the world in the areas of spirituality and religion and it is the birthplace of many religions. Therefore it is not surprising at all that spirituality often blends into organizational culture.

The paper had tried to explain the concept of workplace spirituality with its features. It had tried to analyse that how a spiritual organization is different from non-spiritual one and how it helps in understanding the employee's behaviour more precisely.

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