



WORKPLACE SPIRITUALITY – A TRANSCENDING EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

This conceptual paper explores the definitions of Workplace spirituality and further explores the derivations that can establish a model fit. This is an effort to objectively focus on redefining the workplace spirituality as a factor that derives a holistic Experience for the “Men at Work” in a universal scenario. This objectives lead to conceptualizing the workplace spirituality through literature reviews and then framing a preliminary model to describe the variables contributing to the work place spirituality. The influences that act in the context of deriving workplace spirituality is captured at a conceptual level for further exploration and substantiation. Empirical evidences need to be further captured in the concept to critically evaluate the conceptualized framework.

Keywords: *Workplace Spirituality, Self, Workplace connect, Experience, spirit*

Introduction

The background for the spirituality quotient could be traced back to where work was mostly connected with imitating what God did in fashioning up the existing universal order. The work was considered imitation of God doing and was reflected through arts and crafts. Ancient lore creates a strong delivery of this dimension of work as well as craft ranging from agriculture to production and delivery. Festivals, religious services and craft guilds in the west were depictions of not only material elements of expressions but also linked to the spiritual dimensions. Leaders during the times were also considered as carriers of spiritual duty embodied within them.

Later in the period of industrialization the transformation resulted in separation of individual from the work they did. The farmer and the farming process started separating and then work and the worker concept evolved. The migration of farm to factory, the immigration of people from one place to another seeking betterment, the wage labour mechanism and factory mass production for greater consumption resulted in a perspective of seeing as working for someone else and for something in return. This solidifies the notion of separation of work from the worker where the result of working is expected in a short run period and the result is awaited towards the end of the working process. This enhanced the workplace as separate from the space owned by the individual. The perspectives changes where going to the workplace is not out of passion but is regarded as a routine activity. Seeing oneself as connected to the work they do and the workplace they engage transformed to separately entities as worker/employee, workplace, work, work provider, results, return and self.

Current work scenario reflects the age old traditional scientific management notions carrying a glorified modification of reengineered organizational mechanisms. The management viewpoints have not moved much away from sacrificing for the greater good where individuals are seen to sacrifice for the betterment of the organization where the worker/employee is regarded as a scape goat, though the current management terminologies have far reframed the classics with multi- contextual application. Embedding technological improvements, redesign of work process, employee responsibility and shared accountability paradigms have the desires of those who wish to control the organizations. This background leads to identifying the greater connect with the now separated entities of worker/employee , workplace, work ,work provider, results, return and self encourages exploring spirituality at work place to model a larger experience framework.

Conceptualising Workplace Spirituality

To further explore the transcending spiritual experience that could be hypothesised as an underlying connect that bounds the worker/employee , workplace, work ,work provider, results, return and self, it is necessary to dig deep into the versions that conceptualize spirituality. Spirituality in a relatively early literature is clearly stated as the experience with the sacred which is more subjective in nature Spirituality presupposes certain qualities of mind. It also carries compassion, appreciation. Spirituality is ultimately defined by one as connected to a grater force beyond the true expression of oneself, superlatively expressed in their own terms as something greater than definable. This expression may confine to a true relationship with a higher power. This higher power directly or indirectly affects the doings of oneself (Armstrong, T. D, 1995). Spirituality is clearly defined with difference from religion and is found as encompassed within the concept of religion. Religion is considered as a larger concept than spirituality. (Brian J. Zinnbauer, 1999)a slightly different view point is in describing spirituality is the search for identifying oneself in terms of self-identity and what one must become in terms of meaning , growth and control.

(Evans, C. S, 1990). Further spirituality could be understood based on three distinct yet connected constructs which are connection to something greater than oneself, holism and harmony and realization of one’s potential as well as aspirations (Giacalone, 2003).

Following Peter f Drucker’s mentioning on “work spirit” in “Practice of management 1954 there has been several mentions about “spirit” of workers/employees at workplace in several literatures. “Spirit at work” is considered a striving force for achieving perception of reality whereby experiencing the underlying life -oneness (Neal J, 2003). Meaningful work and sense of community also defines the workplace spirituality (PH, 1997). Feeling of connectedness with oneself and things around including people, resources, materials and methods of work is considered to be as a first of its kind literature on systematically investigating the employee’s spiritual aspirations with regard to the workplace engagement (Mitroff II, 1999). Spirituality is also considered as the holistic way of fully expressing the bodily factors, mental factors and spiritual behaviours through integration of principles and practices backed by general behaviour. This includes friendly work premises and a humanistic management with service orientation, innovation, creativity, environmental sensitivity and based on high level of work efficiency. (WA, 2000). Jobs can be for just meeting the economic needs for some and for others it may be a “calling”, either way, “spirit at workplace” for each one is based on how he/she feels about what he does at the job (Thompson WD, 2000)

Inner self, meaningful work and sense of community stands a strong foundation to understand workplace spirituality better. This establishes the identification of the inner self which is further nourished by the meaningful work endorsed by the person within a community further enhances the feeling of belongingness. This experience could be defined in term of workplace spirituality. (Ashmos DP, Duchon D, 2000). Inner self refers to the employee’s inner (spiritual) needs, which are as important as the physical, emotional and social needs of the employee (Duchon D, 2005) Meaningful work must go beyond organizational survival and of wellbeing of the self and the dependents but nurture a feeling of belongingness and recognition of self as attached to what is being done. If the reason for which an individual works is grand and significant, the individual derive a feeling of wholeness or completeness by doing it (Overell S, 2008) The third dimension is sense of community, which is described as the sense of togetherness and living and sharing within the togetherness. This in an organizational context refers to the togetherness one senses while being in the department prima facie and within the work premises. In the words of Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003a) workplace spirituality is “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 to others in a way that provides feelings of completeness and joy”.

Spirituality in workplace is a universal search that occurs within oneself for the transcendent meaning in life. The desire to do work with subjectivity and purposefulness of serving a greater good for a greater community that provides for connectedness and wholeness. This connectedness and wholeness is derived while one is allowed to integrate ones inner self with the professional identity focused towards a greater good (Ashar H, Lane-Maher M, 2004).

Aspects like inner power, interconnectedness with all those involved in work process and a sense of purpose in the work environment (Marques J, Dhiman S, King R, 2005). The spirituality at workplace is also about the individual considering the work as a whole as a spiritual journey of experiences leading to possibilities of growth for the self while meaningfully contributing to the social premise. It also comprises of one’s integrity, compassion, nature of caring and support for others while also being truthful in values upheld in the work and the workplace (International Center for Spirit at Work (ICSW)

A very recent literature describes the workplace spirituality based on the study in Indian organizations has identified and explored dimensions of workplace spirituality. The three dimensions identified are Spiritual connectedness, Compassion, Meaningful work and Alignment of Values (R. K. Pradhan et al, 2017)

Workplace Spirituality – the Influences

Thus identifying the Workplace spirituality envisages a complex relationship model that defines the variables that influence “Self” that influences “Workplace Connect” which further derives “Workplace spirituality”.



The influencing factors that act on “Self” could be conceptualized as Spiritual (inner) Needs, physical Needs, Emotional Needs, Social Needs with special emphasis from the core influencing factor – the Higher Purpose. Further it is necessary to conceptualize “Workplace Connect” which could be explained through factors like Sense of Community, Meaningful Work, Work Premises, People, Resources, Recognition Received and Belongingness. Thus the transcending Experience of Work Place is derived through Workplace Connect influenced by “Self”.

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