MEASUREMENT OF SPIRITUALITY AT WORK PLACE

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ABSTRACT

Spirituality at workplace is a field which is still in the early phase of development. An increasing trend to its adoption by organizations has been seen in the light of decreasing job loyalties, decreasing productivities and increasing stress levels. The present paper tries to identify the reasons of growing popularity of the concept of spirituality at workplace. Developing spirituality at workplace is recently being seen as a tool in creating work-life balance and results in the complete development of the individuals. The paper thus focuses on the review of literature, both qualitative and quantitative studies which help understanding the different perspectives of spirituality at workplace and the reasons of increasing importance of its practice.

Keywords: Workplace spirituality, organizational performance, employee development

INTRODUCTION

Developing the skills of employees, for increasing productivity has long been a focus of organizations and academicians alike. Thus employees and their environment has become as important as economics. Years of HR experiences have taught organizations to deal with skill development but still experimentation and innovation continues to come to a level where the skill set of the employees can internalize, such that they are self motivated. Perhaps the best initiative that organizations can take to support and see the appropriate implementation of whatever skill set they want to introduce can come with the practice of spirituality at workplace. Recent studies show that organizations which give prerogative to the overall growth of the employees have shown great results. All owes to bringing body, mind and spirit to work i.e the practice of spirituality, which helps people enjoy a greater work life balance. It has helped them to
internalizing the skills they learn as they are able to give a correct direction to their thinking, decision making and actions. Their work becomes not only rational execution of logic, but wisdom arising from love, reverence, understanding and empathy.

To begin with, Spirituality is an Inner path that enables a person to discover the essence of his being, and is experienced as a source of inspiration and orientation in life. Work-life balance is the proper prioritizing between "work" on one hand and "life" on the other. Spirituality has a great role to play in work life harmony, which as a result brings in better internalization of concepts learnt and increase of efficiency of the employee along with inculcating practices of integrity, honesty, quality, cooperation, service, respect, justice and trustworthiness. Techniques like Prayer, Study groups, meditation, higher power lunches, centering exercises like deep breathing, visioning exercises, deep listening, using intuition and inner guidance are recently being adopted by organizations as tools to developing spirituality.

Researchers point to several key factors which have increased the interest towards spirituality at workplace. Increasing corporate downsizing and thus greater workloads on remaining staff, has left them too tired and stressed to be creative, with an increasing demand owing to globalization of markets. Also to survive, organizations must offer a greater sense of meaning and purpose for their workforce. In today's highly competitive environment, the best talent seeks out organizations that apart from providing challenging job profiles’, also reflect their inner values and provide opportunities for personal development and community service, not just bigger salaries. Thus bringing ethics and spiritual values into the workplace can lead to increased productivity and profitability as well as employee retention, customer loyalty, and brand reputation, according to a growing body of research. More employers are encouraging spirituality as a way to boost loyalty and enhance morale.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

While workplace spirituality is considered a highly personal and philosophical construct, nearly all of the academic definitions acknowledge that spirituality involves a sense of wholeness, connectedness at work, and deeper values (Gibbons, 2000). The terms spirit at work, spirituality at work, workplace spirituality, and spirituality in the workplace are used interchangeably to capture similar notions. Numerous scholars have provided definitions or identified components of workplace spirituality, and while there are differences in emphasis, there is also considerable overlap.

Workplace spirituality involves the effort to find one’s ultimate purpose in life, to develop a strong connection to co-workers and other people associated with work, and to have an alignment between one’s core beliefs and the values of their organization (Mitroff and Denton, 1999). Accordingly, workplace spirituality can also be defined 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” (Rego and Pina e Cunha,2008).
Bell and Taylor (2001) believe ‘Workplace spirituality cannot be divorced from its wider societal context’ suggesting spirituality is a way in which dialogue around more holistic views of life can be expressed. Sheep (2004) argues that a conceptual convergence occurs in four recurring themes: a self-workplace integration; meaning in work; transcendence of self; and personal growth/development of one’s inner self at work. Ashforth and Pratt (2003) suggest three dimensions to spirituality at work: transcendence of self, holism and harmony, and growth. Aburdene (2007) believes spirituality in business is today’s greatest ‘megatrend’ and more meaningful work environments and evidence of organisations looking to develop values and a sense of purpose that moves beyond traditional profitability arguments gathers pace.

Further studies not only formally postulate but empirically test for the relationship between employee attitude developed through spirituality and their performance. Ashmos and Duchon (2000) developed a survey and conducted principal components factor analysis, extracting seven different dimensions of workplace spirituality representative of employees’ involvement in spirituality in the workplace at three levels of analysis which is suggested by Neal and Bennett (2000): individual; group; and organization. Three core dimensions include purpose in one’s work or “meaningful work” (individual level), having a “sense of community” (group level), and being in “alignment with the organization’s values” and mission (organization level). The analysis results are supportive of the hypothesized relationships between the spirituality and individual; spirituality and group; and spirituality and organization by studying the factors that are individuals intention to quit the job, intrinsic work satisfaction and job involvement. Milliman et al, (2003) in their research paper have tried to identify the relationship between spirituality and employee work attitudinal variables. While acknowledging that spirituality at work is an abstract concept, this study attempts to provide some of the first empirical support that there is a positive association between spirituality at work and employee job outcomes.

Kinjerski and Skrypnek (2006) developed a The Spirit at Work Scale (SAWS) which is an 18 item measure assessing the experience of spirituality at work. Three hundred and thirty-three was the data set. Factor analyses revealed 4 distinct factors: engaging work, sense of community, spiritual connection, and mystical experience. There was no relationship between SAWS scores and age, gender, education, or income. However, SAWS scores were related to occupation and marital status. Management and professional staff reported significantly higher levels of spirit at work than did administrative, clerical, technical, or trades staff. Individuals who were separated, divorced, or widowed reported more spirit at work than those individuals who were single.

Sadaghiani et al,(2012) in their paper, have presented an empirical study to learn the effects of spirituality in different levels of individual, divisional and organizational. The study selected a sample size of 161 people out of a population of 272 who worked for a power plant unit. The results of survey clearly indicated that spirituality performs a significant contribution on working performance in all different levels. The results indicated that there is a strong correlation among spirituality at work and different levels of spirituality.
Business Week magazine reported on recent research by McKinsey and Company in Australia that found productivity improves and turnover is greatly reduced when companies engage in programs that use spiritual techniques for their employees. The qualitative research that has been conducted has in many ways come from this foundation and contributes towards spirituality becoming a ‘significant force in the contemporary workplace’, one that has been described as ‘irresistible yet vulnerable, creative yet destructive.’ (Pettifer, 2002). Current analysis of the spiritual phenomena is usually directed at a macro level, however, the tension between ‘creation’ and ‘destruction’ - a potent one - is at a micro level in the public sector and it is here more analysis is needed on how spirituality can impact on those who lead and manage in these organisations. (Smith, Malcolm 2010)

Krishna Kumar and Neck (2002) in their paper explore the various perspectives of spirituality at workplace and develop a framework referred to as the “Individual based spiritual freedom model” wherein spiritual diversity and individual encouragement to adopt spirituality leads to outcomes of intuition creativity honesty trust personal fulfilsments and commitments which leads to overall organizational performance. Some scholars argue that spirituality can be used to improve organizational performance (Ashmos and Duchon, 2000) and spirituality research should demonstrate spirituality’s links with productivity and profitability.

DISCUSSION

The concept of spirituality at work is in an early stage of development (Fry, 2003). As can be inferred from the review of literature, the current paper discusses the definition, relevance and results of introducing spirituality at workplace. The review of literature discusses the qualitative and quantitative papers which talk about how and why should spirituality be induced in the workplace, and the benefits of its implementation that come along.

So basically workplace spirituality helps develop managers and staff with more positive, developmental attitudes towards work and progress. It helps in self realization and achieving a sense of job satisfaction, which helps them grow and make the organization grow. Secondly, spirituality at workplace helps become the workers more objective and fair in their work, thus developing an organization culture of integrity and trust. Thirdly, in the highly competitive work environment, creative pool of people serves as the irreplaceable intangible assets for the organization, the development and retention of the creativity of the people is the responsibility of the organization. Bringing in spiritual practices helps organizations develop the creativity and increase the productivity of employees. Finally, spirituality at workplace helps increase the staff loyalty and because so much costs go into developing the skill set of employees, it becomes equally important to maintain the workforce as it takes time to build this asset. Spirituality assists in employee retention, as it results in better work-life balance, thus more satisfaction, hence retained employees.

The studies presented above view spirituality at three different levels: one is self realization or individual goals. Then is sense of community or divisional level and finally is the organizational level. The studies
suggest that the manifestation of spirituality occurs at these three levels. Another study explores the 4 dimensions of spirituality at workplace as engaging work, spiritual connection, sense of community and mystical experience.

CONCLUSIONS

The paper thus suggests that the various studies which explore spirituality from different perspectives, all point to a common finding of the positive relation that spirituality at workplace has with the organizational performance. The spiritual practices at work help in the complete development of the individual as it caters to self realization, satisfaction on personal front, satisfaction on the societal front and satisfaction on the organizational front. So imbibing of the values becomes an inward to outward process instead of an outward to inward process. Further analysing the Spirituality and workplace performance relation empirically can help develop a better understanding of its need and can help in the long term growth of the organizations.

REFERENCES