



Workplace Spirituality an Attribute of Organizational Culture: A New Paradigm

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Abstract— *Workplace Spirituality is not about organized religious practices. It is not about God or theology. Workplace spirituality recognizes that people have an inner life that nourishes and it is nourished by meaningful work in the context of community. Organizations that promote a spiritual culture recognize that people seek to find meaning and purpose in their work and desire to connect with other human beings as part of a community. Organizations whether they realize it or not, must evolve into balanced workplaces and therefore, this paper makes an attempt to understand the theoretical perspective of workplace spirituality and its impetus on a healthy organizational culture.*

Keywords— *Workplace Spirituality, Organizational Culture, Empower, Creativity, Membership*

I. INTRODUCTION

A person's spirit is the vital principle or animating force traditionally believed to be the intangible, life-affirming force within all human beings. It is a state of intimate relationship with the inner self of higher values and morality as well as recognition of the truth of the inner nature of others. Currently, many individuals are struggling with what their spirituality means for their work since this is where they spend vast majority of their waking hours. The office is now where more and more people eat, exercise, drop their kids, and even nap. Many naturally look to their organizations as a communal center because they lack the continuity and connection found in other settings. Moreover, recent polls have found that American managers and leaders want a deeper sense of meaning and fulfillment on the job – even more than they want money and time off.

II. RATIONALE FOR THE LITERATURE REVIEW

There is evidence that workplace spirituality programs not only lead to beneficial personal outcomes such as increased job satisfaction, and commitment, but that they also deliver improved productivity and reduce absenteeism and turnover. Employees who work for organizations they consider to be spiritual are less fearful, more ethical, and more committed. And, there is mounting evidence that a more humane workplace is more productive, flexible and creative. Most importantly for organizational effectiveness is the emerging research that that workplace spirituality could be the ultimate competitive advantage. Because of this, there is an emerging and accelerating call for spirituality in the workplace. Workplace spirituality is not about religion or conversion, or about accepting a specific belief system. Spirituality at work is about leaders and followers who understand themselves as spiritual beings who have a sense of calling that provides meaning and purpose for their lives. It is also about membership where people experience a sense of belonging, connectedness to one another and their workplace community. It begins with the acknowledgement that people have both an inner and an outer life and that the nourishment of the inner life can produce a more meaningful and productive outer life that can have beneficial consequences for employee well-being, corporate responsibility and sustainability, as well as financial performance.

III. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

The respected Dalai Lama, in *Ethics for the New Millennium*, speaks to the relationship between spirituality and religion: Religion I take to be concerned with faith in the claims of one faith tradition or another, an aspect of which is the acceptance of some form of heaven or nirvana. Connected with this are religious teachings or dogma, ritual prayer, and so on. Spirituality I take to be concerned with those qualities of the human spirit—such as love and compassion, patience tolerance, forgiveness, contentment, a sense of responsibility, a sense of harmony—which brings happiness to both self and others.

Spirituality as manifested through these qualities provides the foundation for most, if not all, of the world's spiritual and religious traditions. This explains what some people and organizations (e.g., Alcoholics Anonymous) mean when they claim to be spiritual and not religious. Consequently, spiritual leadership can be implemented and practiced with or without religious theory, beliefs, and practices. In our work on workplace spirituality and organizational culture we have chosen to use the term spirituality to allow for its application to any organization interested in implementing workplace

spirituality. However, this is in no way meant to imply that nondenominational or nontheistic spiritual practices are superior to the religious traditions and their beliefs and practices.

Researchers such as Douglas Hicks, Associate Professor of Leadership Studies and Religion at the Jepson School of Leadership Studies, University of Richmond, think that whatever the theoretical understandings the academic community may have of spirituality and religious distinctions, empirical evidence indicates that spirituality in the workplace is being treated as an alternative to religion more than religion itself being increasingly accepted within work settings. Hicks suggest that workplace spirituality involves adherence to a particular way of thinking about self, work, and organizations. While evidence suggests that people are not always clear regarding the definition of spirituality or its practical application in the workplace, an early contributor to the emergence of a shared understanding of this new emphasis in business includes Howard Gardner. As the John H. and Elisabeth A. Hobbs Professor of Cognition and Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Gardner has described spiritual leanings as one of several critical measures of intelligence. In another seminal publication, *Leadership and the New Science*, author Meg Wheatley points analogously to self-organizing, self-creating systems in nature as a way for companies to work more effectively by embracing the natural cycle of change, stability, and renewal. Thus the “spiritual” or constantly renewing nature of these processes has been construed as an important blueprint for developing workplace spirituality.

Other thinkers have published their attempts to define spirituality in the workplace. They have expanded the conversation, but have not necessarily brought consensus. Even in a recent professional association blog on the subject, researchers in the field were trying to sort out exactly what spirituality in an organization looks like. These bloggers wondered together if the injection of spirituality into the workplace was a uniquely American event that is easily confused with religion and that hinders development of a global approach to the field.

The search for a globally shared understanding of spirituality and its place at work has spurred ongoing debates about the validity and practicality of separating one’s spiritual development from one’s religious experience. The debate has caused some thinkers to wonder if this new emphasis on spirituality represents an inability to integrate spirituality and religion in Western societies that cannot be effectively addressed in a work environment alone.

IV. CULTURES AND DEFINITIONS OF SPIRITUALITY

Indicators suggest that cultures other than that of the U.S. may not be engaged in the same exploration of and confusion about the topic of spirituality in the workplace. Such concern in the U.S. regarding separating personal spirituality from work could be in part due to America’s political insistence on the separation of church and state and therefore the disintegration of personal spirituality from work. This separation stands in stark contrast to cultures in which individuals’ daily lives are infused with religious tradition. Either way, routine list serve discussions by professionals in the field of spirituality seem to indicate a strong need among Western thinkers to sort out some of the confusion on the topic before touting workplace spirituality as a universal organizational value across cultures.

Debaters on one side seem to recommend adapting a uniquely individualized Western view of spirituality that says one’s personal beliefs or ideas about spirituality are private and potentially too volatile to discuss in the workplace. The other side argues that true spirituality is actualized only in conversation with others and within community while lamenting that it is only in America that one’s spirituality is effectively separated from all other concerns within an organization.

Robert Bellah sums it up this way, “The way ‘spirituality’ is often used suggests that we exist solely as a collection of individuals, not as members of a religious community, and that religious life is merely a private journey.” He goes on to suggest critically that religious expression in Western societies has been boiled down to deeply held cultural beliefs about free markets and free choice. “It is the religious expression of the ideology of free-market economics and of the radical ‘disencumbered’ individualism that idolized the choice-making individual as the prime reality in the world.”

The spirituality debate extends beyond business schools and cutting-edge corporate managers. Complications in clarifying the meaning of spirituality at work have arisen more recently with the blurring of religious beliefs and political leanings in the United States. For example, a perception seems to be growing that a person of faith, by definition a spiritual person, votes Republican. While that notion may not be problematic within itself, some fear being labeled “non-spiritual” if one’s party affiliation is Democratic, thus limiting conversations about workplace spirituality to a context of a specific political preference. Others may fear that the emerging emphasis on spirituality could embolden some workers to more actively express their personal religious belief systems at work, thereby threatening to dilute the original conversation regarding spirituality and the value of diversity in organizations.

V. CHARACTERISTICS OF A SPIRITUAL WORKPLACE: SUGGESTED MODEL

Regardless of this ongoing debate, identifying desired characteristics of spiritual workplaces can bring us closer to understanding the role that spirituality can play in organizations, the way it can function to positively impact the bottom line, and the value it might bring to members of the work community.

This article suggests six effects that can be associated with a model of workplace spirituality.

A. *Emphasizes Sustainability*

A systemic view of work and contribution in the world promotes links between sustainability and an awareness of limited resources. This approach to design, production, and commerce is being increasingly associated with spirituality because it seeks to contribute to the greater good in the world. It also has the potential to actually increase market value and attract investors. An understanding of sustainable growth and development includes a well-thought-out strategy that identifies potential long-term impacts or implications of actions that could have an eventual negative impact on business.

B. Values Contribution

More than providing excellent service for customers, global service indicates a larger sense of responsibility to contribute to the betterment of the world. Today's spiritual organization is deliberate in implementing a vision that is built around contributions to the betterment of mankind. It promotes work outside of the organization that contributes to and "gives back" to society through community and volunteer service. Spiritually aware managers and businesses consider themselves servants of employees, customers, and the community.

C. Prizes Creativity

Creativity is a necessary part of the business cycle. When technology, markets shifts, and demographic changes force organizations to rethink products and services, creativity is the key to successfully navigating those changes. The artistic industries have long recognized the spiritual nature of individual and group creative processes, and many educators understand the importance of seamless, daily incorporation of creativity in helping their students learn. The spiritual workplace recognizes that being creative is not necessarily reserved for a special few, but that all people have creative capacities. A spiritual workplace provides resources to help people to uncover their creative potential and to practice creativity within the organization.

D. Cultivates Inclusion

Businesses are increasingly becoming core sources of community for people in societies. The spiritual organization respects and values individuals' life experiences and the lessons learned from them. Such an organization is intentional in its efforts to include individuals who bring appropriate skill sets to a particular job, but who may have been excluded historically from participating in a professional community of practice due to circumstances they did not choose. Such historic exclusion from the workplace has included people with physical disabilities, people whose skin color or ethnic origin differs from those of the majority population, and those who have been discriminated against due to gender or sexual orientation. Increasingly, corporations are seeing the value of their employees working together in community toward a commonly held vision. They have a sense that the concepts of love and acceptance within a cultural context of care builds a sense of community that supports the work of the company and that has a direct impact on the bottom line.

E. Develops Principles

Organizations have begun to realize the benefits of treating the whole person by actively supporting the formulation of ethical principles that promote personal growth, long-term character development, and personal connections of faith and work development. Assisting employees in integrating personal growth, learning, and faith with job performance benefits the organization. This type of principled emphasis includes providing resources that help employees better understand themselves, develop successful professional and personal relationships, and enhance personal management skills.

F. Promotes Vocation

Organizations have long been aware of the benefits of shared ownership of corporate values by every member of the organization. By acknowledging that one's general search for spiritual growth and fulfillment need not be separate from one's work, organizations lay the groundwork for spiritual development to assist in engendering understanding among employees. Companies that understand workplace spirituality go beyond being supportive of learning and development by helping employees develop a sense of "calling" or identification of passion about their lives and their work. Such companies emphasize the discovery and appropriate utilization of individual giftedness and encourage employees to use their unique skills within the organization. Grounded religious faith development is recognized as an important and deeply personal part of growth for many people, one that can help them more easily recognize their vocations.

VI. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Spirituality in the Workplace develops and supports people who:

- Can think co-operatively and/or altruistically;
- Have a balanced, objective view of the world;
- Can listen as much as/more than they speak;
- Apply three-dimensional, 'bigger picture' thinking;
- Believe in some higher driving force and purpose;
- Find the time to think things through objectively;
- Think laterally in order to promote realistic solutions;
- Encourage and empower others selflessly;
- Work open-mindedly with a wide range of people;
- Consistently display integrity and trust;
- Expect the best from people.

Notice that there is very little religious about these criteria – indeed most of them could be considered as general good business practice leading to a healthy organizational culture, without even being overtly spiritual. Perhaps the spirituality element is the importance of these criteria being practiced consistently and co-operatively, with over-lying altruistic intent. This, evidently, takes effort to introduce, monitor and maintain – making the initial preparation of the management structure, practice and support vital to the success of a spiritual or holistic approach.

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