

THE IMPACT OF WORKPLACE SPIRITUALITY AND EMPLOYEE'S WELLBEING AT THE INDUSTRIAL SECTOR

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Abstract

In this 21st century when the world economy has been globalised, organizations are faced with more complexities, competition and structural changes which elicit the introduction of spirituality within the workplace so as to enable human hearts, spirits and souls to grow and flush so that employees and employers will become healthy, creative, innovative, compassionate and productive in all endeavors to the sustenance of the workplace. The study examined the impact of workplace spirituality on employees' wellbeing at the industrial sectors. The descriptive survey research design of the ex-post-facto type was used for the study. The study recommended that Management, Human resource personnel, Industrial Social Workers should be at alert to take into account employees spiritual lives and the value and richness of their collective potential for the wellbeing of employees and the sustenance of the workplace.

Keywords: Spirituality, Wellbeing, Workplace, Employee, Industrial Sector.

Introduction

The modern world is plagued by social, economic, and environmental problems that are the result of human greed and a lack of love and compassion. These large scale problems have triggered in human kind a renewed search for harmony and peace, a search that is essentially a spiritual journey. This spiritual approach recognizes that people work not only with their hands but also with their hearts or spirit.

At the workplace, there exists horizontal spirituality. Horizontal spirituality at work is the desire to be of service to other people and that is demonstrated by service orientation and deep concern for others at work. Consideration towards others (showing concern) and high quality interpersonal work relationship have high worker job satisfaction, low turnover, group cohesion, group performance, and group efficiency. In essence, spirituality provides employees a sense of community and connectedness which in turn increases employees commitment, belongingness, and effectiveness. Spirituality, therefore, can be seen as coming from within and it is beyond survival instinct of the mind. It is pertaining to our meaning and dreams, our patterns of thought, our emotion, feelings and behaviours.

Spirituality at work is not a fringe idea. In fact, spirituality at work addresses human activities relating to personal development, compassion, meaningfulness and joy at work, honesty, trust, job commitment, and wellbeing of employees. Successful organizations such as Hemlett-Packard, Tom's of Maine, Ford Motor Company, the World Bank, AT&T, Chase Manhattan Bank, DuPont, and Apple Computer, have created programmes to bring spirituality to the workplace.

Spirituality and Workers Wellbeing

The wellbeing of employees is in the best interest of communities and organisations. The workplace is a significant part of an individual's life that affects his or her life and the wellbeing of the community. Therefore, wellbeing in the context of this paper is looked at from social construct, reduction in stress, burnout and workaholism and increasing workers morale, commitment to the organization and subsequent increase in productivity of workers.

Workplaces have become the bedrock for the development of community set up for employees. It has become places where people spend most of their lives, develop friendships, create value, and make their most meaningful contributions to society. The average adult spends much of his or her life working, as much as a quarter or perhaps a third of his waking life at work, it becomes their most important community and to some employees, the work and colleagues at work have taken the place of family or social group. The workplace has become the fountain head of community for many people.

Stress induced by workaholism leads to loss of spirituality, chronic illness, pain, fatigue, fear, while higher absenteeism, lower productivity and increase in company's expenditure in form of health compensation claims increases due to stress at workplace. Furthermore, the workplace environment and policies like: downsizing, layoffs, mergers and acquisitions, terrorism, market crashes, uncertainty contribute to the development of workplace stress with resultant effect on reduction on employees' morale, and commitment.

Spirituality and Provision of Sense of Meaning and Purpose

The advent of industrial age have made organizations to concentrate on creating material wealth, putting economic goals and profitability before the social and public needs, hence the bareness of emotional and spiritual needs. As profit maximization become the main strategic objective of most workplace organizations, social, interpersonal and spiritual functions and goals of organizational life have taken a back seat in today's corporations. In most of today's corporations, the central focus persists to be an observable, external, controllable, empirical, and materialistic outcomes or variables which lead to the creation of a "world without depth" and the isolation of the soulful aspects of work life.

Therefore, employees and managers have started to question the success of materialistic principle to individual and collective wellbeing of people as against people's desire for more meaning and quality of life at work. A large number of employees today often feel psychologically isolated and alienated at work as well as a vacuum and lack of meaning in their work lives. The compartmentalization of work, life, family and spirit may rip authenticity off employees, leaving them feeling unfulfilled, stressed and alienated.

Many employees in today's workplaces question themselves and their work, ask themselves about the essence and meaning of their work and search for a sense of purpose and meaning at work. Researches have shown that workplace spirituality has the potential to provide employees a feeling of purpose, a sense of connection, and a sense of meaning at work.

Organizations with stronger sense of spirituality enable employees to exercise stronger values and ethical beliefs in their workplace and empower them to show more creativity and flexibility at work.

Work takes new meaning and significance when it is seen as a calling, a sacred duty, a service opportunity or a way to serve God, other deities, or a higher purpose. Therefore, when work is seen as a calling, it becomes more meaningful and subsequent increase in productivity and commitment of employees. Their finding confirms that productivity and performance increases as a result of deeper meaning at work, as well as how spirituality at work can provide employees a sense of meaning and purpose.

Spirituality and Provision of Sense of Community and Interconnectedness

The provision of a sense of community and connectedness is critical to employees in today's workplaces and corporations. The decline in the local communities and social groups that establishes a sense of connectedness and the dissolution of traditional support systems such as church and family has necessitated the workplaces to have replaced them as primary sources of community for many people. Employees now seek ways and means to connect to each other and to be united in a common vision that goes beyond materialistic aims. This makes the aspects of community and connectedness in spirituality experiences very important in this recent community (workplace or organizations).

Researchers have stressed that organizations are not just machines for producing goods but that they are also forms of human community that foster satisfying and meaningful life experiences for individuals, families and society, produce significant social values and outcomes for society.

Spirituality at work provides employees a sense of community and connectedness through higher levels of employee attachment, loyalty and belonging. Spirituality is linked to positive outcomes and benefits associated with sense of community through building community serving the need for connecting to others at work and being the source of daily expressions of compassion, wisdom, and connectedness.

Discussion of Findings and Implications

The finding showed that employees' wellbeing is guaranteed with the introduction of workplace spirituality. With employees wellbeing guaranteed, it means that workplace spirituality enhances employees' morale, commitment and productivity due to the reduction in stress and burnout. The idea of workaholism was reduced to a moderate level through workplace spirituality hence no danger to organizational productivity, and there is enhancement of wellbeing of employees. This is in line with the views of Burack that spirituality enable employees to feel complete and authentic at work; Turne that spirituality will increase organizational performance; and Bento that empowerment of employees through spirituality will make them to be more honest, courageous and compassionate individuals.

Furthermore, Mitoff and Denton stated that today's organizations suffer deep spiritual emptiness as a result of spiritual impoverishment. As a result of the spiritual emptiness, managers and employees resort to meditation, reflection and spiritual practices, wellness programmes, as well as fitness and sport exercises at work as a method of coping with stress and uncertainty at work and subsequent benefit for the well-being of employees.

The finding further showed that workers with workplace spirituality found the work more satisfying, meaningful and perform better. Workers who can express their spirituality through their work actually find work more satisfying and meaningful and accordingly perform better. This is in line with the findings of Mitroft and Denton, Gull and Doh that workers who find meaning in their work activities perform more responsibly, ethically, collaboratively and creatively at work. Furthermore, employees who incorporate their spirituality and values into their work show increasing personal satisfaction and job commitment become creative and innovative, increased empowerment, more cohesive in vision and purpose, and enhance team and community building. The building of spirituality in the workplace through a company's philosophy builds trust and mutual respect, which in turn contribute to cooperation and sharing a sense of purpose.

The finding established that the sense in interconnectedness/community through workplace spirituality lead to the wellbeing of industrial employees. Since the level of interconnectedness of spirituality involves the mental, emotional and spirit connections among employees in teams or groups in organizations, it means that the essence of community (workplace inclusive) involves a deeper sense of connection among people, including support, freedom of expression, and genuine caring. All these attributes guarantee wellbeing of individual at the workplace.

Recommendations

I. For the attainment of employees' wellbeing, forms of spirituality recommended by industrial social workers in the workplace should include optional morning prayers or yoga sessions, designing multi faith prayer spaces, starting corporate chaplaincies. These will give employees mental alertness, reduction of stress and build community spirit.

II. Since organizations that suffer from a deep spiritual emptiness have series of problems both with and among employees, managers and employees are encouraged to resort to meditation, reflection and spiritual practices, wellness programmes, fitness and sport experiences at work as a method of coping with stress and uncertainty at work.

III. Industrial social workers should allow the spirituality tendencies in employees to see work as a calling because when work is seen as a calling, it becomes more meaningful and this will increase peaceful mind, productivity and commitment of employees.

IV. Industrial social workers should advocate on behalf of employees that management should try to accommodate and encourage spiritual requests from employees. Organizations should encourage their employees to feel free to express their own spiritual beliefs. As long as

the spiritual requests of some employees do not limit the freedom of others, managers should respond to them.

V. Since workplace of today are more diverse and multicultural than ever before, such diversity should be acknowledged while absolute respect for individual differences should be followed. Since spirituality is a highly individual and idiosyncratic experience, it is necessary that spiritual practices be customized based on the principle of respecting and valuing individuals unique inner landscape, values and perspective.

VI. Since the aim of any organization is to engage a whole person at work with all their minds, hearts, spirits and souls. It is important to acknowledge employees as spiritual beings. Management, Human resource personnel, social workers are therefore alerted to take into account employees spiritual lives and the value and richness of their collective potential.

Conclusion

In this 21st century when the world economy has been globalised, organizations are faced with more complexities, competition and structural changes which elicit the introduction of spirituality within the workplace so as to enable human hearts, spirits and souls to grow and flush so that employees and employers will become healthy, creative, innovative, compassionate and productive in all endeavours to be sustenance of the workplace.

Irrespective of whether or not, we allow ourselves to be consciously shaped by any explicit religious idea; we act in ways that leave us either healthy or unhealthy. What shapes our actions is our spirituality. Spirituality is concerned with how we construct a sense meaning and purpose in our lives. As seen spirituality has the potential to make a core contribution to human wellbeing, nourish human connections and enhance sense of community development within the workplace. In conclusion, it is when people work with a committed spirit that they can find a kind of meaning and purpose, a kind of fulfillment in the workplace and the employees' spiritual level will not only reduce stress, conflict, and absenteeism, but also enhance wellbeing, quality of life and work performance.

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