What Makes a Workplace Spiritual: A Conceptual Framework Describing Antecedents and Outcomes of Workplace Spirituality

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Abstract

Workplace spirituality is becoming a buzzword and we cannot deny the fact that it has received growing attention during the last decade in the field of organizational sciences. But still there exists a research gap on the aspect that what all can be determining factors for workplace spirituality at workplace. This research is an attempt to frame a model which servers the following purpose: (1) determining the possible factors on which workplace spirituality depends, and (2) determining the organizational factors which depend on workplace spirituality.

From exhaustive literature review the following factors can be said as the determinant of spirituality at workplace – mindfulness, meaningful work, sense of community, organizational values, compassion and inner life. Findings of this conceptual study also reveal that job satisfaction and organizational commitment can be the best possible outcomes of workplace spirituality. And if perceived organizational support is considered as moderating variable then higher order job satisfaction is attained from workplace spirituality. The paper is conceptual study which can be empirically tested and verified.

Introduction

The concept of workplace spirituality reflects employee expressions and experiences of spirituality at work (Pawar, 2009) which are determined by various organizational aspects such as mindfulness, compassion, transcendence (Petchsawang & Duchon, 2009), meaningful work (Marschke et al., 2011), organizational values (Gupta et al., 2014), inner life and sense of community (Daniel, 2015). It also acts as precursor for job satisfaction (Martin et al., 2005, Gupta et al., 2014; Altaf & Awan, 2011) and organizational commitment (Rego & Cunha, 2007).

Workplace spirituality is search of meaningful life within workplace by doing meaningful work and attaining organizational objectives. Dehler and Welsh (2003) describe spirituality at work as 'a search for meaning, deeper self-knowledge to a higher level'. Tepper (2003) defines spirituality as 'the extent to which an individual is motivated to find sacred meaning and purpose to his or her existence', but not associated with religion (Mitroff & Denton, 1999).Ashmos and Duchon (2000) address spirituality in the workplace both from the experience of individuals and the organization's work environment. Workplace spirituality is defined by Olivia and Adhiatma (2014)asthe work situation in which leader and follower have high spirit toward work completion and achievement of organization objectives.

Workplace spirituality leads a person for meaningful work by making him more creative and susceptible to change. Spirituality in the workplace is about people who perceive themselves as spirited beings, whose spirits desire and need to be energized through work (Marschke et al., 2009). It is about experiencing real purpose and meaning at work beyond paychecks and performance reviews (Marschke et al., 2011). Spirituality is about people sharing and experiencing some common

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attachment, attraction, and togetherness with each other within their work unit and the organization as a whole (Hong, 2012).A spiritual workplace encourages employees to be more creative, to consider changes more positively, and to achieve better adjustment as they experience higher job satisfaction, psychological well-being, and organizational commitment (Martin et al., 2005; Gupta et al., 2014).

Spirituality is seen as an important workplace factor which is widely discussed over the last few decades (Gupta et. al. 2014; Bell & Taylor, 2004; Casey, 2004; Driver, 2005; Fry, 2003; Hicks, 2003; Krishnakumar and Neck, 2002; Lips-Wiersma and Mills, 2002; Lund- Dean et al., 2003; Tischler, 1999) gaining the interest of both scholars and practitioners (Hicks, 2003; Kinjierski & Skrypnek, 2004; Krishnakumar and Neck, 2002).Within the framework of this discourse, it has been attempted to relate work place spirituality to a wide variety of organisational functions and practices. So far none of the researcher has developed a theoretical model

that can describe all those organizational factors impacted by workplace spirituality and the factors on which workplace spirituality depends. This paper aims in developing a theoretical framework with keen focus on these two aspects:

(i) determining the possible factors on which workplace spirituality depends
(ii) determining the organizational factors which depend on workplace spirituality

The outline of the paper is as follows: Firstly, a framework is introduced containing all factors that are helpful in determining workplace spirituality in workplace such as mindfulness, meaningful work, sense of community, organizational value, compassion, inner life and transcendence. Secondly, basic determinants are examined that are impacted by workplace spirituality such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment. After that, the moderating effect of perceived organizational support on workplace spirituality and job satisfaction relationship is discussed.

Figure 1. Theoretical Framework for Precursors and Antecedents to Workplace Spirituality
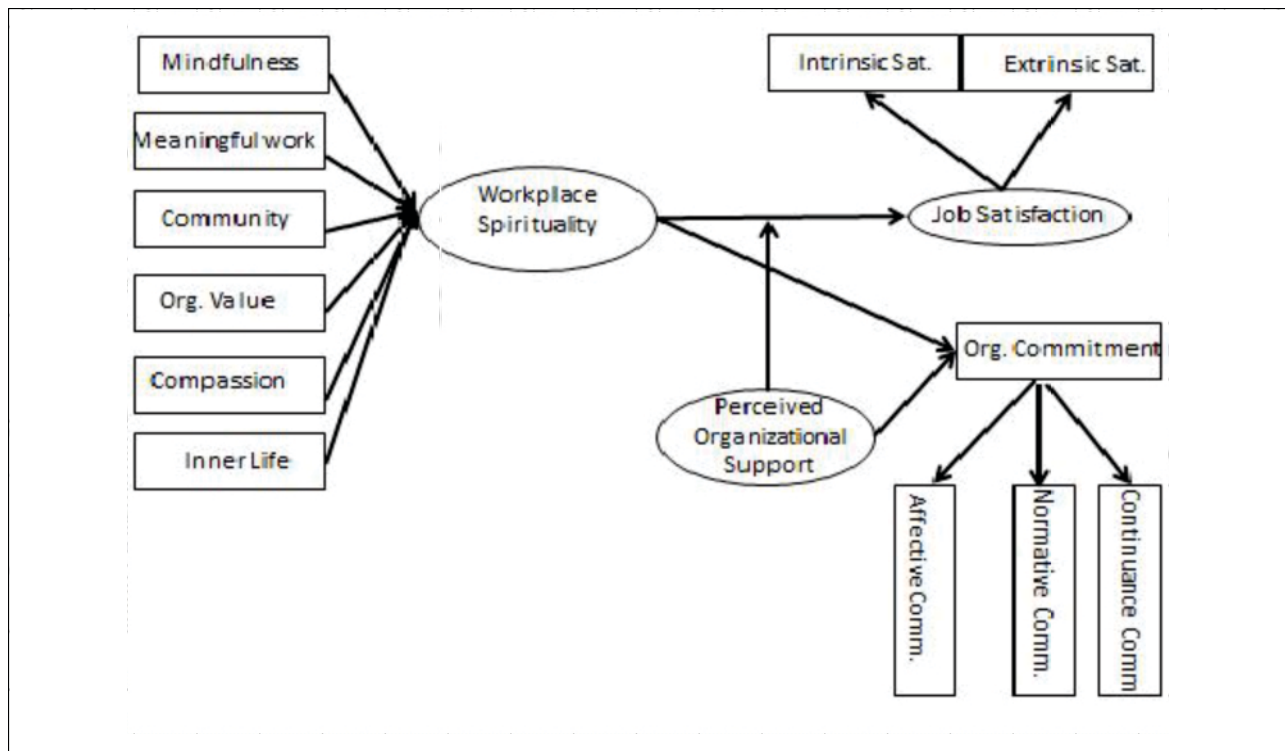
Finally findings of the research are summarized and the practical and theoretical implications are discussed.

Framework for Workplace Spirituality in an organization

For developing an in-depth understanding of workplace spirituality and factors associated with it, a framework has been built (see Figure 1) on the basis of existing researches.

Mindfulness

According to Petchsawanga & Duchon (2009) - a state of inner consciousness in which one is aware of one's thoughts and actions moment by moment-can be defined as mindfulness. Mindfulness is about a person's mind being present, not wandering with past, future thoughts or other distractions. It is important to note that mindfulness is about acting with awareness; therefore, it stands in contrast to notions of 'automatic pilot', acting without awareness (Baer et al., 2004). By being aware of their thoughts and actions in the present, people are better able to control their emotions and behaviours. Eight items from the 'Mindful Attention Awareness Scale' (MAAS) (Brown and Ryan, 2003) can be used to measure mindfulness.

Meaningfulness of work

Meaningful work is defined as one's experience that his/her work is a significant and meaningful part to his/her life(Petchsawanga and Duchon, 2009). Indeed, one feels that work has meaning for him/her beyond the material rewards (Duchon & Plowman 2005). Meaningfulness of work is all about individuals feeling that his or her work is an important and meaningful part of life (Gupta et al.,2014). Meaningful work provides opportunities for creativity leading to the happiness and joy that will ultimately increase employees' spirituality at workplace and also creates a sense of joy and energy at work (Duchon and Plowman, 2005). In another sense, meaningful work answers the question of why one is in the workplace by acknowledging that his/her work helps him/her to express his/her inner self (Krishnakumar & Neck 2002). Meaningful work can be measured using seven items from Ashmos and Duchon (2000).

Sense of Community at workplace

A feeling of harmony derived from working for a common cause with a group of other people (Duchon & Plowman 2005). Today, employees spend the majority of their time at the workplace with little time left for neighbors or friends (Gupta et al.,2014). Thus, they want to fulfill this need at the workplace through a sense of community.

Organizational values

Because of rapidly changing work environments organization values are becoming very important and must be followed by every member of the organization (Gupta et al., 2014). Milliman et al. (2003) found that organizational values are the most important spiritual factor at workplace.

Compassion

Compassion is defined as a deep awareness of and sympathy for others (Twigg & Parayitam 2006) and a wish to relieve their suffering (Farlex, 2007). Compassion leads to a responsibility for another who is less fortunate or suffering (Delgado, 2005). Additionally, Delgado (2005) argues that it is a desire for mutual caring and supporting others. In this sense, a spiritual person generates an awareness of the needs of others and a desire to help other people (Ingersoll, 2003). Measuring compassion presents a challenge as no complete, validated scale exits. Therefore, the items used to measure compassion were adapted from the work of McCormick (1994), Mohoney and Graci (1999), Ingersoll (2003), Delgado (2005), and Twigg & Parayitam (2006).

Inner Life

Ashmos & Duchon (2000) mention that inner life is about finding an opportunity in the workplace to

express aspects of our own, not necessarily an ability to conduct physical or intellectual tasks. In addition, Duchon & Plowman (2005) note that "employees have spiritual needs (i.e. inner life), just as they have physical, emotional, and cognitive needs, and these needs don't get left at home when they come to work". According to this theory, the employee will experience greater motivation when there is a match between the inner life of the individual and the work. Moreover, Duchon & Plowman (2005) highlight the fact that "people whose self-concept includes a spiritual dimension will be motivated if their work context enables expression of their spiritual identity". So, the inner life part of workplace spirituality also involves a spiritual part that plays an important role in attitudes and aspects such as stress.

Workplace Spirituality and Job satisfaction

Past researches set premises for claiming that workplace spirituality have a positive effect on Job Satisfaction. Studies conducted by McLaughlin (1998) emphasized on workplace spirituality as it increases the profitability of organizations by better performance. From common practice and research, it has been seen that work overload has a negative effect on job satisfaction, whereas work place spirituality seems to have a positive effect on the job satisfaction. Spirituality at workplace puts emphasis on the needs of the employees and in result achieves better productivity as valued employees tend to show better performance on being satisfied (Altaf & Awan, 2011). Spector (1997) claims that job satisfaction is simply how people feel about their jobs and the different aspects of how they perform their job requirements. It is the extent to which people like (satisfaction) or dislike (dissatisfaction) their jobs. Job satisfaction may be viewed in the overall content an employee experiences or some sort of specific, momentary satisfaction (Cook et al., 1981). In this way, there are two types of satisfaction an employee may experience: intrinsic and extrinsic. One study states that these two divisions in job satisfaction are clear measurements of how employees like or dislike

their work; what they feel towards their tasks and their organization (Bhuian et al., 1996; Locke, 1976). Extrinsic satisfaction is experienced when the organization rewards an employee for doing a good job, most likely through the form of a raise or promotion (Bhuian et al., 1996). Intrinsic satisfaction deals more with the employees own internal feelings of accomplishment and self-actualization. Another source defines intrinsic satisfaction as "an individual's attitudes toward elements related to work such achievement, responsibility, advancement, and growth" (Herzberg, 1968). This form of satisfaction has closer ties to an employee's spirituality. Past studies had proven that intrinsic satisfaction has a deeper and a more lasting effect on an employee, keeping an employee dedicated to his or her tasks more so than extrinsic satisfaction does.

Workplace Spirituality and Organization Commitment

Organizational commitment can be defined as a psychological state that characterizes an employee's relationship with the organization and reduces the likelihood that he/shewill leave it (Allen & Meyer, 2000). The most cited model of organizational commitment was developed by Allen and Meyer (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Meyer& Allen, 1997). It differentiates three commitment components: affective (emotional attachment to the organization), continuance (perceived costs associated with leaving the organization) and normative (feelings of obligation towards the organization). Each of these components contributes to strengthening the likelihood that the employee will remain in the organization, but the nature of each mind-set differs from the others. Employees with a strong affective bond remain because they want to do so. Those with strong continuance commitment stay because they feel they have to. Normatively committed employees remain because they feel they ought to.

Another important feature of the model is that all three components have implications over permanence or withdrawal. Stronger the

commitment, stronger is the intention to stay. However, it is expected that each of the components will have a different pattern of behavioural consequences (Allen & Meyer, 1997; Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). Since, affective commitment relies on an emotional attachment to the organization; it is likely that affectively attached employees will be motivated to make greater contributions to the organization compared to employees with a weak affective bond (Rego & Cunha, 2007).If continuance commitment is the primary tie that bonds employees to their organizations, this attachment may lead to desirable work behaviour (Allen and Meyer, 2000). Finally, the model predicts that employees who feel an obligation towards the organization(normative commitment) tend to want to make positive contributions.

This reasoning leads to a simple yet powerful argument: to reach higher performance, organizations need to develop high organizational commitment. We hypothesize that the higher the spirituality at work, the higher the commitment (Fry, 2003; Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003;Milliman et al., 2003). Theoretical and empirical evidence supports this contention. For example, benevolent activities (e.g. kindness towards colleagues) generate positive emotions and can result in more positive employee attitudes about work and the organization. These, in turn, can translate into commitment towards the organization (Pfeffer & Vega, 1999; Milliman et al., 2003).

Moderating role of Perceived Organizational Support

According to organizational support theory the development of Perceived Organizational Support (POS) is encouraged by the tendency of employees to personify an organization as though it were with human-like characteristics (Eisenberger et al., 1990). POS was defined as the degree to which employees perceive that the organization cares about their well-being and that their contributions are valued by their organization (Eisenberger et al.,

1990;Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).POS has been pointed out to be related to those positive outcomes for employees(e.g., job satisfaction, positive mood) and for organization (e.g., affective commitment, performance, and less withdrawal behavior) (Pathak, 2012; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).Therefore, POS was expected to bring better performance to the organization by increasing employees' obligation to their organization, and more involved in their work (Jain et al., 2013).Moreover, POS has been found out it has a significant negative moderating impact on the relationship between pro-social behavior and unethical attitudes as when unethical attitude increased, reported frequency of pro-social behavior decreased (Adebayo, 2005). Pro-socialbehavior reflects to a human concern for others and organization, it include the behaviors such as helping others and volunteering in an organization which workplace spirituality share the similar concept in one of the dimensions, sense of community (Brief & Motowidlo, 1986;Milliman et al., 2003).Also, In Jain et al. (2013) POS has been examined to have negative moderating impact on OCB and organizational stressors. It also noted that out of 56 significant interactions only one was positively significant which is the Individual Initiative dimension of OCB was positively influenced by the interaction effect of the Job Security dimension of organizathonal stressors on POS. Individual initiative refers to employees engage themselves in task related behaviors at level that go beyond what an organization required or generally expected which job involvement also perform the similar concept (Podsakoff et al.,2000). According to the findings above, in this study the significant moderating impact of POS between workplace spirituality and job involvement will be proposed. The hypothesis is shown below.

1. Workplace spirituality within any organization depends on Mindfulness.
2. Workplace spirituality within any organization depends on Meaningful work.
3. Workplace spirituality within any organization depends on sense of

community.

4. Workplace spirituality within any organization depends on organizational values.
5. Workplace spirituality within any organization depends on compassion.
6. Workplace spirituality within any organization depends on inner life.
7. The relationship between workplace spirituality and Job involvement will be positively moderated by perceived organizational support.
8. There is a positive relationship between workplace spirituality and organizational commitment.

Discussion

It is an undeniable reality that workplace spirituality is a construct widely discussed over the last few decades (Bell &Taylor, 2004; Casey, 2004; Driver, 2005; Fry, 2003; Hicks, 2003; Krishnakumar & Neck, 2002; Lips-Wiersma & Mills, 2002; Lund- Dean et al., 2003). So, thestudy aims at describing the precursors of workplace spirituality. With adequate literature support we framed a theoretical model, shown in Figure 1. Model shows that workplace spirituality in any organization depends on 6 factors; which are a combination of individual and organizational factors. The factors on which workplace spirituality within any organization depends are – Mindfulness, Meaningful work, Community, Organizational Values, Compassion and Inner life. These factors are in accordance with past researches on workplace spirituality such as – Petchsawanga&Duchon (2009); Duchon &Plowman (2005); Gupta et al.(2014); Milliman et al. (2003).

Moreover the study also figures out the outcomes of workplace spirituality in any organization. The major and most important outcomes of workplace spirituality in any organization can be – Job satisfaction (both intrinsic and extrinsic) and organizational commitment (affective commitment, normative commitment and

continuance commitment).

This study can be very useful for researchers and practitioners as they can use the models defined in the study for empirical analysis also the propositions proposed in the study can be verified empirically. Also researchers can construct further theories to explain the role of individual commitment viz., affective commitment, normative commitment and continuance on workplace spirituality (Pawar, 2009). Also researchers can work out on the relationship between intrinsic job satisfaction and extrinsic job satisfaction with workplace spirituality.

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