Ramifications of Religiosity and Spirituality on Organizational Culture
To drive-in Positive Transformation – A Conceptual Analysis

Review Article

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ABSTRACT

In today's stressful work environment, employees seek a workplace that augments their religious and spiritual quest. Till date, very few researches have been conducted linking organisational religiosity, spirituality and workplace culture. The purpose of this paper is to present organisational religiosity and spirituality as an emergent construct to enhance holistic transcendence of employees . This paper presents a conceptual analysis of the effects of religiosity and spirituality on the culture of organizations which affects the overall work-environment, job satisfaction and performance of employees. Furthermore, the reviews provide ample evidence that when spirituality is considered in an organisation, it provides positive results to the organisation like organisational profitability, employee productivity and higher ethical standards. This paper developed some propositions that can be tested through empirical research in future. A conceptual framework is presented, showing the relationship between religiosity and spirituality as both individual and organizational factors as well as their connection to organizational culture. The implications for professional practice are discussed.

Keywords:

Organizational culture,

Religiosity,

Spirituality,

Employee performance

INTRODUCTION

In the globalized corporate driven 21th century, matters of belief in God, ethical conduct and spirituality in organizations are issues that have taken a back-seat. The effects have been destructive as has been witnessed in the recent global economic recession triggered by unethical corporate practices. There is an ever increasing rate of employee depression and burn-out than ever before. It is obvious that a better understanding of religiosity and spirituality in organizations would have some positive effects. It is time to change the unspoken rule that a person's religiosity and spirituality is like a cap that can be removed and forgotten as soon as an employee enters the doorway of an office or factory (Morgan, 1997) in order to facilitate who they really are and avoid potential catastrophes.   It is time to change the often described analogy of "oil and water" to represent religion/ spirituality and the workplace which HR managers insist are two separate domains that cannot, and should not, be mixed (Gunther, 2001). There is growing evidence that the once distinct line between religious and spiritual beliefs and the workplace is blurring. According to Morgan (1997), the "traditional wall separating religion from the organization seems to be crumbling at an accelerated rate." Hill and Smith found that between 1994 and 2004 the percentage of workers stating that they "feel the need to experience spiritual growth in their work" increased drastically from 30% to 78% (King and Crowther, 2004). Recent studies have examined the relationship between religious and spiritual beliefs on job satisfaction (Cavanagh & Bandsuch, 2005; Milliman, Czaplewski & Ferguson, 2003; Davidson & Caddell, 1994; Pfeffer, 2003), job performance (Kolodinsky, Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2008), self-esteem and work frustration (Allen & Meyer, 1996).

Koenig et al. (2000) gave a clear definition for both religiosity and spirituality. They proposed that in order to be close with the sacred and transcendent who is God or ultimate reality, an organized system of practices, rituals and belief which is in short 'religion' is required. It gives an insight on one's relationship and responsibility with others in the community. Spirituality, on the other hand could be defined as the personal quest for understanding answers to ultimate questions about life, about meaning, and about relationship to the sacred or transcendent, which may (or may not) lead to or arise from the development of religious rituals and the formation of community.

An empirical study by Mitroff & Denton (1997) on religiosity and spirituality in organizations revealed that almost all participants believed in a higher power or God, while only half agreed they felt that power while at work. They also found that employees rarely prayed or meditated in the workplace. Heermann (1997) highlighted the fact that although spiritual practices and spiritual values have been absent as variables in organizational research, they may be among the most powerful variables related to employee and organizational effectiveness.

Currently there is a lack of research that directly links the concepts of religiosity and spirituality towards organizational culture. This study seeks to cover that gap by studying previous researches on these concepts and find the underlying linkages. It is hypothesized that employees' religiosity and spirituality are significant predictors of organizational culture. Although a positive organizational culture is crucial for effectiveness of organizations, it has received miniscule attention from researchers under the perspective of employee religiosity and spirituality. The current research use in-depth literature research to explore their relationship for the intention to develop a conceptual framework.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Religiosity

Among the factors that affect culture, one of the key elements of a cultural phenomenon that is found to have significant influence on people's values, habits and attitudes has been found to be religion (Belzen, 1999). Religion is the unified system of beliefs and practices that pervades the cultural value structure of a society, forming a central part of the intellectual and ideological elements of a country's culture. In countries such as in India, Israel, Saudi Arabia and Iran, with their ancient religious history that has spread to all parts of the world, religion is a major cultural force. Because religion is sacred and its' value system has to be accepted unquestioningly by all members of the society, it has become part of all aspects of daily life in such countries, from decisions on how to lead family-life, to matters of education, the workplace and even an understanding of government (Berkman, Lindquist & Sirgy, 1997). Since punishment for people who are potential deviants is expected, it provides a powerful determent to maintain and continue the salience of expected norms and rituals.

Religion is generally accepted as a subsystem of culture, and is considered as a way of life that motivates its followers to strive for achieving certain values (Schwartz & Davis, 1981). The values promote religious dogmas, norms, moral ideas, ritual requirements and protect from certain taboos (Wulff, 1997; Berkman et al., 1997). These values that are imbibed by people based on religious-orientation are a strong force in forming attitudes and behavior. It is through religion that specific systems with necessary symbolic meaning are created that corresponds with cultural values concerning the supernatural (Geertz, 1993). Bowen (1998) points out that as religion is one of the foundation pillars of moral teachings in society, it provides adherents with a set of principles by which to live, strongly influencing the believers in their daily activities.

According to Clarke (2006), there is great difficulty in prescribing a commonly accepted definition for religion that has consensus in social science. Wulff (1996) states that the term 'religion' has three historical designations attributed to it - there is a supernatural power to which people must respond; the person has a feeling present in him or her that can conceive such a power; and there are ritual acts carried out showing respect for that power.

Religiosity in Organizational Culture

With the world businesses increasingly moving towards globalization and with people of various cultures and religions working within the same office-space during the last decade, research on religious diversity and religiosity has become an attractive field for organizational research. According to Fernando & Jackson (2006), since the world's major religions have endured the test of time over centuries, their values would be highly relevant in the management of today's organizations. Few studies have found a link between individual religiosity, workplace culture having religious accommodation and employee behaviour. There have been indicators of strong positive correlations discovered between people's religiosity and their job attitudes (Sikorsa-Simmons, 2005; Kutcher et al., 2010); as well as religiosity and ethical decision-making in organizations (Weaver & Agle, 2002; Fernando & Jackson, 2006). Often managers are guided by the moral and ethical guidelines needed in order to resolve issues and problems their organizations face (Weaver & Agle, 2002). It was also noted that higher religiosity had a positive correlation with greater job satisfaction and was a noteworthy predictor of organizational commitment (Sikorsa-Simmons, 2005). Religious employees showed higher scores on the importance they placed on work, demonstrating a significant difference than their non-religious counterparts (Harpaz, 1998).

According to Tracey & Hinkin (1998), although religion still plays a profound role in contemporary societies, it is surprising that modern organizations still know relatively little about the dynamics of religion and organizational culture. According to her, management researchers are yet to seriously explore the relationship between religion and organizational culture in a more meaningful and determined way. Tracey opines that this may be because religion is considered too sensitive a topic to be explored, or far removed from the commercial organizations that form the empirical focus of much work.

McGuire, Omer & Sharp (2012), conducted a study examining the impact of religiosity on financial reporting in organizations. Based on the results, they concluded that religiosity represented a mechanism for reducing costly agency conflicts, particularly when other external monitoring is low. They predicted that firms situated in religious areas had a more ethical culture where they were less likely to engage in financial reporting irregularities as their research showed clear links between religiosity and reduced acceptance of unethical business practices. Their research results showed that firms headquartered in areas with strong religious social norms experienced lower incidences of financial reporting irregularities.

Many researchers note that there is increased organizational religiosity in recent times, with religious symbols and practices are becoming more prevalent and acceptable in the workplace, with an increase in enrichment and empowerment programs, prayer meetings, scriptural-study, religious/spiritual language, and requests for time off for religious obligations or holidays (Garcia-Zamor, 2003; Mitroff & Denton, 1999). A fair number of studies have examined the influence of religion in the workplace.

Mitroff & Denton (1999) in their study administered on top executives from businesses across the USA, found that nearly all participants believed in the higher power of God over anything, and half of them agreed that they felt the effects of this power while at work. Similarly, Adam's (2008) study showed positive correlations between prayer and motivation. Oler (2004) examined the extent to which religiosity affected daily work practices and leader/ follower trust levels among top management and their subordinates. The findings revealed that the more members attended worship services, the more likely they demonstrated specific positive actions and attitudes at work. Vasconcelos (2009) pointed out that religion is an unescapable subject that influences employees' behaviors, perceptions, and decisions. McCarty (2007) in his research showed a positive relationship between office prayer meetings and increased employee morale and productivity as well as decreased employee turnover.

Managers view prayer as a source of accuracy in their corporate decision making (Cavanagh & Hazen, 2008). Executives regard prayer as being beneficial as it helps them to keep their mental and emotional capacities at an optimal level, thereby motivating them to make the right decisions (McGee & Delbecq, 2003). Jayasinghe & Soobaroyen (2009) found that religiosity is an integral part of accountability in non-western societies, with both playing a part in trust, aspirations, loyalty, social status, power, and rivalries. Nur (2003) found that self-described religion-oriented companies exhibited higher levels of overall satisfaction.

In conclusion, organizational religiosity i.e. religious accommodation of diverse people's needs make the most of their unique talents, experiences and backgrounds to succeed in a very competitive global marketplace. The current study aims to provide more insight into organizational culture under the perspective of religiosity in the organization. The following propositions have been developed referring to the conceptual framework presented later:

P1: Religiosity of employees plays a significant role on the organizational culture affecting employee performance and well-being.

P2: Organizational religiosity, accommodating employee religiosity in the workplace plays a significant role on the organizational culture affecting employee performance and well-being.

Spirituality

Traditionally spirituality has always been commonly linked to religion. From the ancient days of the Hindu Vedas and Buddhist teachings, biblical Abrahamic and Islamic scriptures, spirituality was always closely connected with religion. In the western world, the Christian reformers between the 16 and 17 centuries, such as Wycliffe, Erasmus, John of the Cross, and Ignatius of Loyola, realized that religion had become too political and sought to free the practice of religion from the ties to earthly institutions (Jamison, 2006). The reformers wanted the religious

masses to concentrate on their own interior spiritual world of faith rather than the exterior world of religious practices. This led to a separation of spirituality from religion. William James, in 1902, was recognized as the first to propose formally separating religion from spirituality (Jamison, 2006). India has always existed as a land of spirituality where both tourists and worshippers from around the world came for finding spiritual inner-peace. From the days of the ancient sages to the modern yoga workshops and World Guinness record set by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2015 (NDTV, 2015) for the largest yoga class as well as the largest number of nationalities participating in a single yoga event, India has always existed as a land of spirituality.

The question of what spirituality is, is one that is continually being asked. According to Klerk (2005), spirituality has been described to include a broad range of concepts and values including transcendence, balance, sacredness, selflessness, meaning in life, living with a deep connectedness to the universe, and the awareness of something or someone greater than oneself providing energy and wisdom that transcends the material aspects of life. To provide clarity to this broad concept, Valasek (2009) summarized the range of definitions on spirituality into seven general categories including, searching for meaning and purpose; living in harmony with others; personal wholeness, wellness, holistic; achieving personal growth; ethics, integrity, or values based; belief in the divine; and sense of justice or fairness.

Dehler & Welsh (2003) formulates spirituality as the expression of spirit, behaviorally or cognitively. They described the spirit in terms of emotion, as a search for meaning, aspirations and deeper self-knowledge. Emotion is the personal feelings of meaning, purpose, knowing and being that energize action. Thus spirit is an inner source of energy and spirituality is the outward expression of that source.

Organizational Spirituality

Spirituality in organizations is a particularly important issue in scientific and practitioner literatures that has been noticeably absent as a variable of study in organizational research. Yet, it is considered among the most powerful variables related to personal, team, and organizational effectiveness (Heermann, 1997).

Organizational Spirituality (OS) has been defined in a number of different ways. A spiritual organizational culture provides meaningful work that instills a feeling of purpose, that fosters a sense of connection and positive social relations with coworkers, and that provides workers with the ability to live integrated lives (Rego & Cunha, 2007). Similarly, Milliman et al. (2003) explain that an organizational culture is spiritual in the extent that it serves as an outlet for its members to satisfy their inner needs, to have a positive impact on society, to develop strong connections to others, and to have consistency between one's core beliefs and the values of the organization. Thus, 'work-spirituality' is defined as the organization's search to find and inculcate in employees a sustainable, meaningful and sacred understanding of the self and his/her relationships with others.

Whether incorporating spirituality practices in organizations will result in an increase in productivity is a controversial issue. Some researchers view spirituality as anti-materialist (Dent et. al, 2005) while others argue that spirituality can be used to improve organizational performance (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Garcia-Zamor, 2003). In the last decade, many research projects have reported positive relationships between spirituality organizational culture and organizational effectiveness and performance (Bierly, Kessler & Christensen, 2000; Mitroff & Denton, 1999). Yet research conducted on the impact of spirituality on organizational culture has not been consolidated and reviewed in depth.

Barnett (1985) proposed a model of employee development that attempts to integrate workplace experience with spiritual experience. The model is based on two life concepts, where the first comes from the ancient Hindu tradition in which the householder establishes a foundation for spiritual growth by providing for the physical welfare of his or her dependents. The second is based on the Native American Medicine Wheel in which an individual engages in self-discovery as he or she moves from a state of innocence to that of enlightenment. Thus instead of a series of steps to be climbed, an individual's career becomes a path to personal enlightenment, by leading through mastery of material skills towards spiritual growth and self-knowledge.

According to Karakas (2010), there are three spiritual perspectives that can positively impact organizational culture and performance are:

i.   HR perspective: Spirituality enhances employee well-being and quality of life.

ii. Interpersonal perspective: Spirituality provides employees a feeling of interconnectedness.

iii. Philosophical perspective: Spirituality provides employees a sense of purpose .

Evidence indicated that managers are grasping that prayer can be a source of accuracy or a lesser margin of error in their corporate decision making (Cavanagh & Hazen, 2008; Vasconcelos, 2009). McGee & Delbecq (2003) asserted that executives regard prayer as being beneficial to them because it helps them to keep their mental and emotional capacities at an optimal level, and they feel somehow inspired to make right decisions.

The following propositions are presented for future studies:

P3: Spirituality of employees plays a significant role on the organizational culture affecting employee performance and well-being.

P4: Organizational spirituality, providing a more serene and peaceful environment in the workplace plays a significant role on the organizational culture affecting employee performance and well-being.

Organizational Culture

Organizational culture has today developed from the fields of psychology, sociology, and management to become recognized as the driving force behind successful organizations. It has managed to become one of the key tools in understanding the behavior of people in organizations which predicts the sustainable growth of the firm itself. Today, organizational culture is one of the most explored phenomena of organizational behavior and an inevitable variable in explaining the functioning and sustainable performance of all kinds of organizations.

The concept of workplace culture has become one of the most important topics in organization sciences. Barley et al. (1988) highlighted that the origin of workplace culture research can be traced back to researchers who were influenced by the works of sociologists such as Schein (1985) & Van Manen (1976) who focused on the understanding of organizational dynamics. Though these researchers did not discuss organizational culture per se, the underlying theme of their studies was the same. Their outcomes influenced a new generation of academics towards the study of workplace culture in two directions. One of them is the practitioner-oriented perspective argued that by paying attention to the firm's ideals, values and norms instead of their strategies, the management can enhance organizational effectiveness (Ouchi & Price 1978; Peters, 1978). The other perspective which was 'theoretically-inclined' held that organizations can be conceived as 'socially constructed systems of meaning' with 'intersubjective realities' that influence organizational dynamics (Pettigrew, 1979; Schein, 1985). Both these schools of thought encouraged further research in the study of organizational culture and thus the modern understanding of workplace culture was born (Barley et al., 1988).

Culture has been applied to represent the various ways that human beings interact at work leading to two major research approaches- the functionalist approach claims that culture is something an organization has while the interpretive approach suggests that culture is something an organization is (Smircich, 1981). Researchers such as Wilkins (1983) have opined that the effect of organizational culture is not as strong as that of national culture, since organizational culture will not reach the depth of socially shared understanding that human beings inculcate from their societies during childhood, as its learning happens only during adulthood. Other researchers such as Jaeger (1983) have contradicted this view by suggesting that a firm with a strong organizational culture tends to have a strong influence on the values of employees. Many modern researchers are interested in workplace culture so as to inculcate strategies for managing diversity of multi-cultured employees in multi-national corporations. Donald and Rattansi (1999) called the phenomenon of diversity and multiculturalism in culture as a "saris, samosas and steel-bands syndrome" since such a focus provides only a superficial manifestations of culture that fails to understand the complexity of culture and its formation. Schein (1985) reminded that organizations must create a culture that links members together, by fostering an environment where all are equally respected and appreciated.

Organizational culture was defined by Berryman (1989) as a set of assumptions or beliefs that are shared by members of an organization. It refers to the ways that they are "rendered specific and differentiated" (Donald & Rattansi, 1999). Hofstede (2001) defined it as the collective programming of the mind, which can distinguish the employees of one organization from another. In a study conducted by Hofstede (1998), six dimensions of organizational culture were identified. The dimensions included process-oriented versus results-oriented, which shows a difference between a concern with means and a concern with objectives; employee-oriented versus job-oriented, which focuses on the differences between a concern for people and concern for getting the job done; parochial versus professional, that compares members who derive their identity largely from the organization and members who instead identify with their type of job; open system versus closed system which is a dimension that compared the difference between the two types of systems; loose versus tight control that focused on the amount of internal structuring within organizations; and normative versus pragmatic, where normative units emphasized on correctly following organizational procedures, which was seen as being more important than result, while pragmatic units were market-driven which focused on meeting customer needs, since the final results was seen as being more important than following procedures.

Conceptual Framework:

Based on past literature review, this research concentrates on creating a conceptual framework that reveals the relationship between the two factors, namely religiosity and spirituality that are divided into individual and organizational aspects and their impact on the culture of an organization. This framework emphasizes the need to have a more accommodating approach by organizations in dealing with employee religious beliefs as well as in inculcating a more spiritual environment so as to facilitate a positive organizational work culture. Thus it is found that the independent variables, religiosity and spirituality are positively related to the culture of organizations which in turn lead to motivated employees who perform higher along with more creativity, team-bonding, loyalty to the firm and reduction of stress. The diagram framework is given below:

IMPACT OF RELIGIOSITY & SPIRITUALITY ON ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE – CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
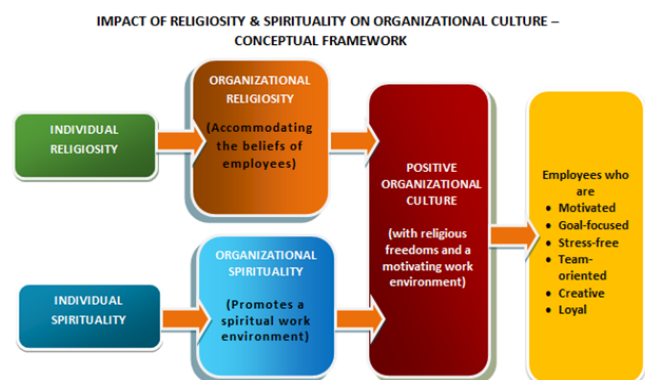
CONCLUSION

It is a contradiction that religiosity and spirituality benefit only the society. This conceptual paper sketched the crucial benefits of employees' religiosity and spirituality compounded by the positive effects of organizations inculcating a religious and spiritual work culture on employee work satisfaction and performance. There are several consequences for managers who attempt to create changes in employee behaviors in their organization. The factors of religiosity and spirituality are dynamic in nature and the relationships between them and organizational culture will continuously evolve. Their relationship needs to be given careful thought and consideration for an effective organizational culture. It is recommended that the top management should take initiatives to provide a framework that will lead to the formalization of religious and spiritual practices, thereby enhancing the organizational culture leading to better values and commitment of employees. It is imperative that researchers and practitioners continue to examine strategies that support employee motivation and work satisfaction to improve the overall culture of organizations. Further research is required to measure the factors proposed in this model and provide a comprehensive framework by identifying all the relevant factors that influence organizational culture.

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