

WORKPLACE SPIRITUALITY AND INDIVIDUAL SPIRITUALITY

Abhiyash, Soumi Hazra¹, Remya Lathabhavan²

VIT University, Vellore, India

Received: 14 March 2020 Revised and Accepted: 8 July 2020

ABSTRACT: Workplace spirituality has been an interesting area of research in today's stressful times of cut-throat competition in the corporate world. What organizations need to understand is that to enhance production and productivity levels it is imperative to focus on workplace spirituality for which they have to boost the individual spirituality of each employee. The objective of this research paper is to find any potential link between the chosen dimensions and workplace spirituality and finally establishing a correlation between individual spirituality and workplace spirituality quotient.

KEYWORDS: Compassion. Supportive work-culture. Understanding between employees. Burnout. Work satisfaction.

I. INTRODUCTION:

In today's fast-moving world, companies are focusing mainly on how they can churn profit without investing more money in resources. The type of resource which is neglected more often is the work-force (or labor or employees). Workplace spirituality is a concept which when applied correctly can exponentially increase the production of the organization while maintaining the work satisfaction of the employees. The concept of spirituality has long existed but the impact of it in the workplace has not been fully explored and is in its nascent stages. However, this topic has been gaining traction as the management research is now focusing on the concept and trying to find ways how spirituality can create value for businesses. Spirituality is now being utilized as a tool for change. The main driver behind using spirituality is that people thrive for something more than just material gains in the workplace. Intrinsic motivation can help people focus harder and lead to more productive actions. Organizations may also inculcate this by having colleagues that bring motivation to the work, linking the work outcomes to impact in the community or contributing to an idea or a mission larger than the individual. All these ideas shape up the concept of spirituality at workplace.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Spirituality:

'Spiritual' and 'Spirituality' relate to the spirit, the unseen makeup of humans (Garett, 2004). 'Spirit' can be aptly described as the 'essence of life' (Gull & Doh, 2004). Spirituality has been discussed for many years and the topic has been studied extensively in different countries and cultures. 'Religion' and 'Spirituality' are often perceived to be related to each other, however, 'Spirituality' is more about man's search for a meaning or true purpose in life and be in a state of intrinsic happiness transcending self. Religion on the other hand, provides for a structured mental discipline that merely facilitates spiritual growth. For the purpose of this paper, religion and religious activities have been excluded. There are many definitions of Spirituality. Some have been listed below:

1. Containing a capacity to go beyond self-centrism and transcending further with increased love and knowledge (Chandler and Holden 1992).
2. Something that gives life a purpose and an aim and an inspiring force to go beyond one's self (McKnight 1984: 142).
3. Spirituality is the full potential of a human that deals with the biggest purposes, with God, with life, with purpose (Tart 1975: 4).
4. Self-values, life and everything one considers ultimate characterizing a way of life and experiencing it in full awareness within a transcendent dimension (Elkins et al. 1988: 10).

Individual Spirituality:

Spirituality is an individual's journey of understanding oneself better, finding a purpose and transcending to a higher level (Dehler & Welch, 2013, 114). In the true sense, Spirituality begins with individual spiritual development, which essentially is the process of growing the intrinsic human capacity for self-transcendence, in

which the 'self' is embedded in 'something greater than the self', including the sacred. It is the developmental engine that propels the search for connectedness, meaning, purpose and contribution (Benson, Roehlkepartain & Rude, 2003). Spirituality is the basic feeling of being connected with one's complete self, others, and the entire universe (Mitroff & Denton, 1999). Spirituality entails living by inner truth to produce positive attitudes and relationships; expressing a desire to find meaning and a purpose in life (Neck & Milliman, 1994, 9-10). It thus is the basic desire to find ultimate meaning & purpose in one's life and to live an integrated life (Mitroff & Denton, 1999).

The most common aspects in description of spirituality are transcendence, followed by meaning, mystery, animating or life-giving, connecting or unifying (Delgado, 2005,159).

Workplace Spirituality:

Humans or 'Spiritual beings' are social animals and live in connection with other human beings, and the notions of sharing, mutual obligation and commitment that connect people to each other, are the important constituents of spirituality (Duchon & Plowman, 2005, p 814). Spirituality encompasses 'Connectivity in a society, forgiveness and morality' (Mahoney & Graci, 1999). Finding meaning in work reflects a sense of what is important, energizing and joyful about work (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). A positive correlation has been found between finding the work meaningful and the individual's own values and consciousness (Krishna Kumar & Neck, 2002). There exists a strong connection between spirituality and values of an organization.

Kinjerski & Skrypnek (2006) explored the three main dimensions of individual spirituality at work as:

- Engaging work (meaningful work)
- Sense of community at the workplace, and
- Spiritual connection (inner life).

Each aspect significantly impacts how a person feels, acts and responds at the workplace and thus defines his happiness levels as well as overall workplace spirituality. These aspects make deeper connections over a long period of time as work experience in an organization grows. Research has shown that experienced employees exhibit higher spirituality at the workplace (Garg, 2017)

Job Satisfaction:

One of the major outcomes of workplace spirituality is job satisfaction that comes from the working environments, sense of community and how it enables individual's expression of their own character and individual's experience (Ashmos & Duchon). A happy worker is a productive worker, is believed in industry circles (Fischer, 2003), and it has been found that there exists a positive linkage between performance of the workforce and job satisfaction (Petty et al, 1984; Fischer, 2003). Performance of the employee directly impacts the value added to the organization (Spagnoli et al, 2012). There is also seen a positive correlation between job satisfaction and lower employee turnover in organizations (Judge et al, 2017).

III. METHODOLOGY:

Quantitative research methodology, through convenience sampling has been adopted for the purpose of this research. A set of questions were administered to 91 respondents working in various organizations, in the public, private as well as govt. sectors. The questions were directed towards assessing the individual spirituality of the candidate, how it affects the environment around them at work, practices prevalent in the organizations centering around motivation, engagement and empathy towards employees. The questions were asked with the help of a Google form, which was circulated through online mode to the participants.

An individual's spirituality, as we came to know after reading and analysing multiple research papers (five papers on 'Workplace Spirituality' by each team member), has roughly the following dimensions:

- *Burnout:* Long term psychological and (or) emotional extreme stress caused by high work pressure or at times balancing personal responsibilities with work.
- *Compassion:* Empathizing with colleagues of your organization especially when they are in distress or the require help.
- *Work satisfaction:* Positive state of mind wherein the employee is extremely happy with the work conditions and the work assigned to him.
- *Supportive work culture:* This refers to a healthy work culture in which all employees motivate each other and are always ready to lend a helping hand to one another. This type of work environment leads to maximum job satisfaction and hence lessens burnout to a great extent.

○ *Understanding between employees:* This dimension is closely related to ‘supporting work culture’ and ‘compassion’ which generally refers to a close bond between the employees of an organization. This dimension also reduces burnout.

Please refer to Annexure-I below for the questionnaire.

IV. RESULTS & DISCUSSION:

Total number of responses received: 91 responses.

The results of the study are depicted in Annexure – II below.

As we discussed above, spirituality is an intrinsic attribute which can be developed and used as a tool to boost the productivity and efficiency of employees, while keeping them engaged and happy. The study revealed quite a few interesting points, some of which were quite predictable while some were not. Responses were analysed and collated against these following 5 main dimensions of workplace spirituality:

Compassion at the workplace:

With regard to the questions relating to *compassion* as a dimension of spirituality; many of the responses were predictable, because if a workplace is healthy where every employee is cherished and acknowledged by their colleagues, it will definitely aid the employee to feel better and hence reduce *Burnout*, indirectly uplifting individual as well as workplace spirituality. Almost 93% of the respondents agreed that compassion at the workplace fosters team spirit and 96% agree that compassion helps in boosting individual spirituality levels.

Understanding between employees:

The study results revealed that a majority of the respondents (89%) feel that understanding amongst the employees forms the base for a high individual spirituality quotient. Although 75.8% replied positively w.r.t. expression of empathy by top management, we got a significant disagreement of 24.2% which showed that the top management is not open towards expressing empathy and understanding towards its employees. Improving this can bolster better understanding of employees by their superiors, making them feel more elevated and accepted, foster team spirit and can in turn raise workplace spirituality.

Supportive Work-Culture:

The study results for this dimension were pretty predictable as a supportive work-culture provides a sense of community for the employee, which feed into the individual spirituality of the employee. 83% of the respondents agreed with the first statement of this dimension, whereas the second question which was more focused towards workplace spirituality, 90% of the respondents agreed with the statement.

Burnout:

Burnout is a very big factor which negatively affects the life of an employee. Burnout is a phenomenon which happens when a person is put under extreme workload or stress. This condition deteriorates many employees' health condition and hinders them from being productive. We got a very positive response from the respondents with 93.4% agreeing with the statement no (7). But for the second one (No.8), although 60.4% agree but 39.6% of the respondents disagreed, which showed that organizations should improve in providing tools which helps employees in dealing with burnout.

Job Satisfaction:

This is the biggest dimension we chose because this effects individual spiritual quotient of a person significantly. If a person is doing a job which gives him intrinsic happiness or given the work where he/she is happy, it will definitely increase the productivity of that person which will in turn help the organization. The study revealed that while 69% agree with statement no (11), 31% of the respondents feel that they are not assigned the job that they want. For the statement no (12), while 85% agreed, 15% disagreed which showed that some employees are not happy with the jobs they have been assigned. This is a major aspect that the organizations need to improve upon, which can help in increasing the workplace spirituality quotient of the organization.

Respondents' suggestion:

These are some of the suggestions that the respondents gave which could help enhance workplace spirituality:

- Policies of the organization need to focus more on employee centricity and management.
- Companies need to encourage natural and sincere conversation style instead of formal and postured conversations
- The culture of giving, sharing, supporting and empathizing needs to be encouraged and duly recognized.
- Greater connect with the leadership team for reassurance during time of crisis.
- Showing genuine care for employees through effective health and well-being programs.

V. IMPLICATIONS:

The findings of the research put forth several initiatives that organizations need to undertake and practice. Organizations always want more and more productivity from their employees and are trying to find different ways to increase the productivity and efficiency of their workers. But they often forget that employees join organization to find or “go on a journey to find that something” which helps them in achieving “self-actualization”. The employees should be assigned meaningful, sustaining and fulfilling work which can very easily become fuel to boost their individual spirituality. Work contributes to the individuals’ definition of self. Enhancing factors associated with meaningful and fulfilling work will, in turn, enhance job satisfaction.

VI. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE SCOPE:

The results of this study are still preliminary. While the current findings are interesting, there is always the possibility of people not answering honestly. Also, individual spirituality is a subjective matter. We cannot say that if something helps them achieving spirituality, that same thing will help others.

The future scope of this study lies in candidates promoting each other in terms of spirituality which in turn should boost their efficiency. A more in-depth study should help in establishing an overall working practical application for boosting the individual spirituality of each employee which, in turn, might reduce the subjectivity of the matter.

VII. CONCLUSION:

Individual spirituality is something that gives a person intrinsic happiness and provides the fuel to keep working, even in times of extreme stress. As one stays true to their nature and keep doing their work, consciously or unconsciously, it keeps feeding into their individual spirituality which in turn promotes workplace spirituality. After careful evaluation of the answers given by the candidates, we can draw the conclusion that there is a positive relationship between Individual Spirituality and Workplace Spirituality quotient of an organization.

Annexure -I:

The questions that were present in the Google Form covered all the aforementioned dimensions of ‘Workplace Spirituality’. The questions asked were:

- 1) Compassion helps employees feel better at the workplace.
- 2) Compassion is a key element in keeping connected to each other in the workplace.
- 3) Employees of your organization understand each other in terms of the challenges/problems faced by them.
- 4) Top management is open towards expressing empathy and understanding towards its employees.
- 5) Your organization recognizes your help extended by you to a colleague in problem/sickness.
- 6) Your organization encourages your support towards good work done by a colleague/team member.
- 7) Spirituality in your life can help you in dealing with burnout (extreme stress condition).
- 8) Your organization provides the necessary support/tools for helping you deal with burnout.
- 9) There is a scope for professional growth in your organization.
- 10) All these aspects discussed above can help in achieving spirituality at the workplace?
- 11) Your organization assigns you the work that is meant for you (work that gives you intrinsic happiness).
- 12) You are happy with the work that the organization has assigned to you presently.

13) What one aspect would like to change/add in your organization to enhance Workplace Spirituality?

For questions Q1) to Q12), the following options were provided:

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

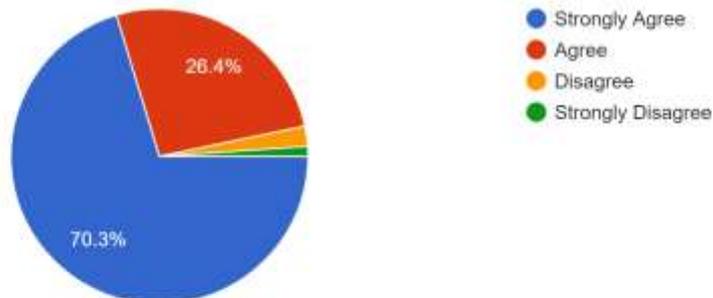
For the last option, that is, Q13) just a blank was provided to answer since it wasn't an MCQ type of question.

Short answer text

Annexure – II:

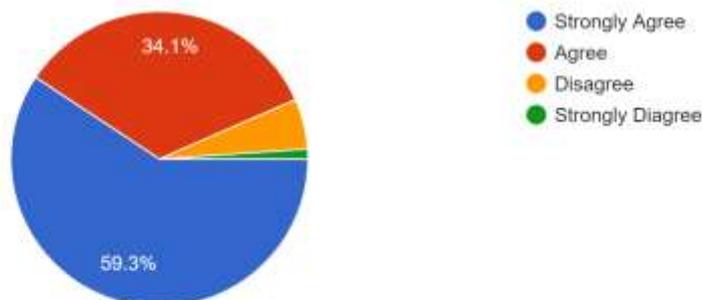
Compassion helps employees feel better at the workplace?

91 responses



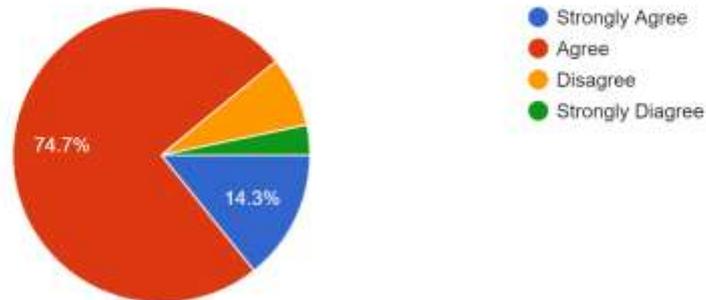
Compassion is a key element in keeping connected to each other in the workplace.

91 responses



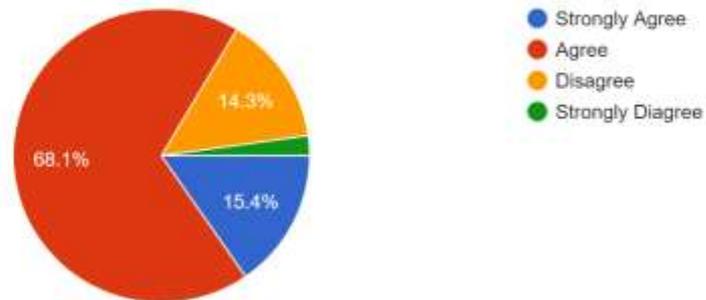
Employees of your organization understand each other in terms of the challenges/problems faced by them.

91 responses



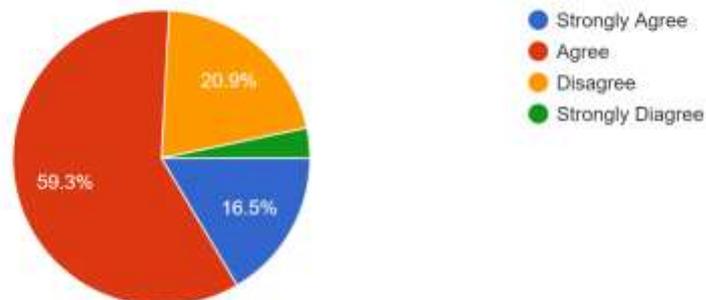
Your organization recognizes your help extended by you to a colleague in problem/sickness.

91 responses



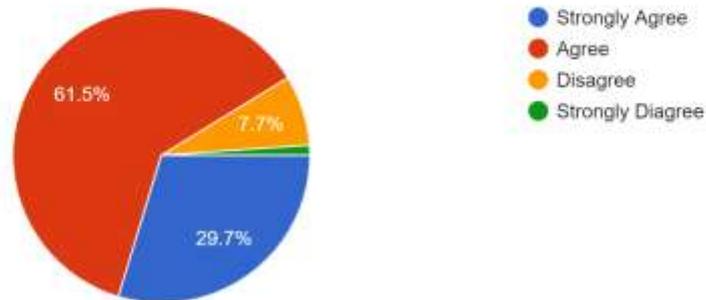
Top management is open towards expressing empathy and understanding towards its employees

91 responses



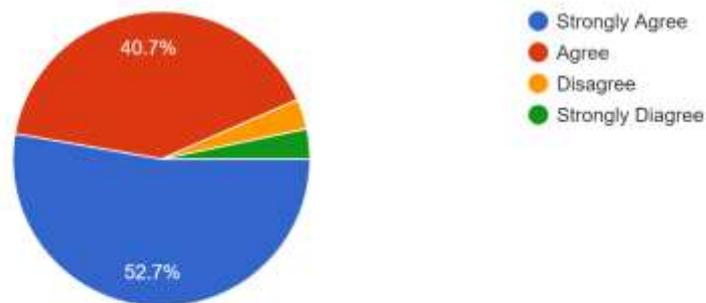
Your organization encourages your support towards good work done by a colleague/team member.

91 responses



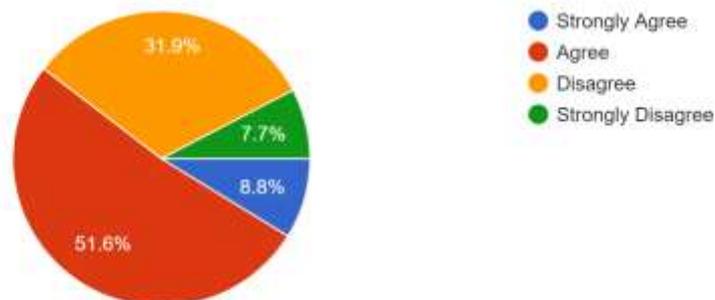
Spirituality in your life can help you in dealing with burnout (extreme stress condition)?

91 responses



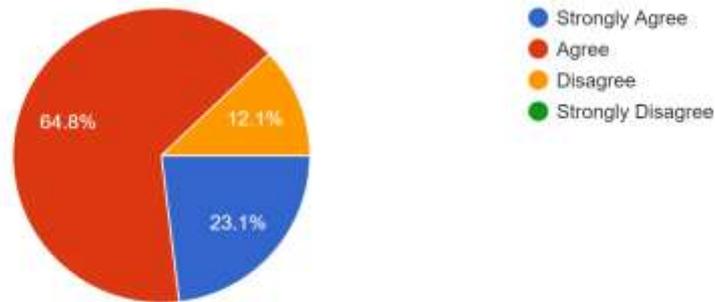
Your organization provides the necessary support/tools for helping you deal with burnout.

91 responses



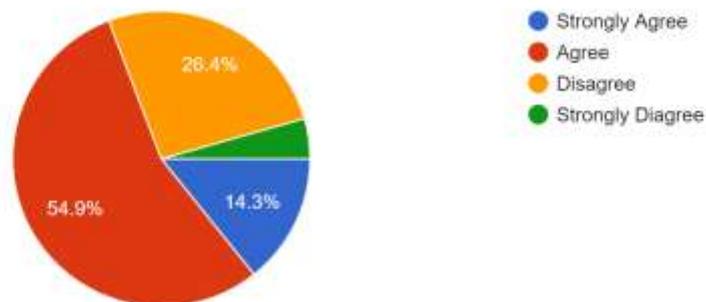
There is a scope for professional growth in your organization.

91 responses



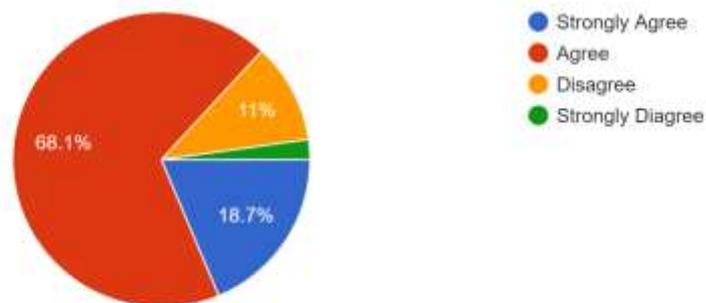
Your organization assigns you the work that is meant for you (work that gives you intrinsic happiness).

91 responses



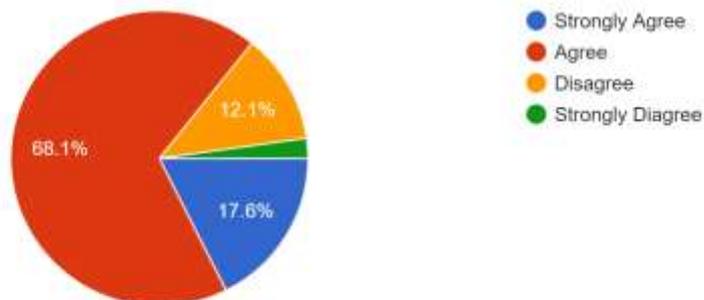
All these aspects discussed above can help in achieving spirituality at the workplace?

91 responses



You are happy with the work that the organization has assigned to you presently.

91 responses



VIII. REFERENCES:

- [1] Shaad Habeeb and N.U.Khan, Impact of Spirituality at Workplace on Job satisfaction (2018), Kamla-Raj publications
- [2] Sajeet Pradhan, R.K.Pradhan, Shantanu Mazumder, Workplace Spirituality and Job Outcomes (2012), www.indianjournals.com
- [3] Ferdinand E.Tablan, Spirituality of work in Bhagawad Gita(2016), www.academia.com
- [4] Saleheh Piyaei, RazieZare, Workplace Spirituality and positive work attitudes (2013), Indian Journal of Economics and Development
- [5] Archbishop Dr. Thabo Makgoba, Understanding Spirituality at Work, Organizations and in Management, www.academia.com