

Sculpting Spiritual Workplaces

Abstract

Spirituality at work is not about religion or about getting people converted to a specific belief system. The recent trend in businesses globally to reclaim and recognize the spiritual nature of people and the importance of incorporating the 'whole person' at work continues to change the face of how business is done. This paper explores the changing business contexts leading to the emergence of spirituality at work places. It also attempts to build a business case for spirituality. The two interpretations of workplace spirituality are discussed to better understand the suggested strategies to sculpt spiritual organizations.

Key words: Spirituality, Sculpting Spiritual Workplaces

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The word Spirituality is derived from the Latin word '*spiritus*' which means 'breath'. Spirituality deals with the issues of inner beliefs and feelings. It sheds light on human experiences of reality, purpose and meanings of life. People often turn to spirituality with a hope to unearth big questions like: who are we? Why are we here? What does it mean? Where are we going? Spirituality thus is a journey of self discovery, embedded in being connected with others and the world around to find 'your place and meaning in the world'. Gibbons (2000), describes spirituality as feeling a sense of deeper values and connectedness. There is a significant difference between spirituality and religion. Spirituality at work is not about religion, or about getting people converted to a specific belief system (Laabs, 1995; Cavanagh, 1999). Hawley's 1993 classic about Dharmic Management - living by your inner truth - drew a distinction between spirituality and religion, where spirituality is the goal and religion is the path.

Changing Business Contexts

Business context over the years have changed from Rationalistic to Humanistic to Wholistic and now Spiritual. Each phase represents a fundamental shift in the nature of business, organizational culture, and leadership and management styles. The Rationalistic context for business dominated leadership thinking in the 1960's and continues to dictate in some circles even today. From this perspective, business was survival of the fittest and competition was a 'win - lose' game. The objective of business and its leadership was wealth creation (specifically profit maximization). Business leaders took on the leadership model of command and control to serve the overall goals for efficiency and productivity. The employee was usually seen as an exchangeable part in the big machine and expected to perform within clearly defined parameters.

The Humanistic context of business leadership first gained momentum in the 1960's and became the norm of major corporations by the 1980's. Even though the purpose of business and leadership in humanistic approach was still wealth creation, they displayed a 'win - win' mentality in which 'enlightened self interest' superseded 'selfish interest'. Employees were considered a 'resource' to be managed sensitively. Win - win problem solving was prominent in this context.

The Wholistic business context was popular in the mid 70's to 90's. From this view the goal of business and leadership evolves beyond wealth creation for share holders to 'wealth creation for the optimal benefits of all stakeholders which includes shareholders, employees, customers, competitors, community, nature, society and also the future generations. The 'people, planet, profit' was a paradigm in this context. Initiatives like 'corporate social responsibility' gained popularity and also became a legal mandate in some countries.

Spirituality in the workplace is a movement that began in the 1990's in which individuals seek to live their faith and spiritual values in the workplace. Leadership in this context focuses on enabling and assisting people with opportunities to fulfill their life purpose while integrating that with the organizations purpose of existence. In the rationalist, humanistic, and wholistic contexts, if "spirituality" is considered at all, it is usually as one of many aspects of life... along with work, family, leisure time, health, etc. If life were a cake, spirituality would be one slice of the cake. In this fourth context, *spirituality is the cake itself*. Work, family, leisure, and health are all "slices" of spirituality and gain their meaning from a spiritual context – including business.

Today, each of these four contexts of leadership co-exists in the business world, at times not very peacefully, because each context requires a different approach. Within a company too, different leaders may operate from any one of these four contexts or a single leader may operate from a blend of contexts.

Business Case for Spirituality at Workplace

An explosion of book labels mirror a growing movement to bring spiritual values into the work place: Megatrends 2010, The Soul of Business, Liberation the Corporate Soul, Working from the Heart, The Stirring of the Soul in the Workplace, Jesus CEO, What would Buddha Do at Work? Spirit at Work, Redefining the Corporate Soul, The Corporate Mystic, Leading with Soul etc. There are two journals devoted to the topic; Spirit at Work and Business Spirit. Some books closer to the theme such as Stephen Covey's pioneering 'The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People' and 'The Monk who sold his Ferrari' by Robin Sharma sold millions of copies globally.

A Harvard Business School study, examined ten companies with strong corporate culture and ten with weak corporate culture, drawn from a list of 200 leading companies. Researchers in this study not only found a dramatic correlation between an organization's spiritual culture and its

profitability; but, also found that, in some cases, the more spiritual companies outperformed the others by 400 to 500 % in terms of net earnings, return on investment, and shareholder value (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003). Providing empirical evidence (Milliman et al, 2003) researched and reported positive association between spirituality at work as measured by meaningful work, sense of community and alignment of values with the organization with outcomes such as organizational commitment, intention to quit, intrinsic satisfaction with work and job involvement. *Business Week* magazine reported a recent research by McKinsey and Company in Australia that found, productivity improves and turnover is greatly reduced when companies engage in programs that use spiritual techniques for their employees. In researching companies for his book, *A Spiritual Audit of Corporate America*, business professor Ian I. Mitroff found that “Spirituality could be the ultimate competitive advantage”.

Recently, A study conducted by Fry and Slocum Jr. (2008) found that higher levels of spiritual leadership subsequently had higher levels of spiritual well-being that in turn positively impacted organizational commitment, productivity, and sales growth. Lips-Wiersma and Venkataraman (2006) provided a number of compelling examples of companies that had integrated corporate sustainability and spirituality, achieved superior performance evidenced by key financial parameters. A study conducted by Duchon and Plowman (2005) revealed that work unit performance is associated with work unit spirituality; work unit performance is greater in work units that enable a spiritual (or spirit- friendly) climate. Also, the study found that work unit spirituality is associated with the leader’s ability to enable the worker’s inner life, sense of meaningful work and community.

There are new financial indexes that track the performances of socially responsible companies. The leading benchmark is the KLD Domini 400 Social Index for socially and environmentally responsible investing worldwide. Dow Jones Dharma Global Index tracks companies aligned with the principles of non violence and earth stewardship. The principle of Dharma contains precepts relevant to good conduct, but also the implicit requirement of mindfulness about the sources of wealth — and therefore responsible investing.

Sustainable business, earth stewardship, spirituality in workplaces are optimistic signs that point to the fact that business as the most influential institution in the world is changing / transforming from within.

Understanding Workplace Spirituality

The varying perceptions and definitions of spirituality in the workplace make this an interesting phenomenon. Freshman's (1999) qualitative research, —An Exploratory Analysis of Definitions and Applications of Spirituality in the Workplace, used grounded theory to develop definitions based on specific applications of spirituality in the workplace, and is important in defining this phenomenon. Freshman found:

- Not any one, two or even three things can be said about spirituality in the workplace that would include the universe of explanations.
- There is no one answer to the question, what is spirituality in the workplace?
- Definitions and applications of spirituality in the workplace are unique to individuals. Therefore when planning any group or organizational intervention around the topic, again the suggestion is made to derive definitions and goals from the participants themselves.
- There are many possible ways to understand such a complex and diverse area as spirituality in the workplace.

For the purpose of this paper, the term workplace spirituality has been limited to two interpretations. One interpretation suggests workplace spirituality involves an organizations facilitation of employee experience of spirituality at work. Consistent with this version it is defined as ‘ a framework of organizational values evidenced in the culture that promotes employee experience of transcendence through the work process, facilitating their sense of being connected to others in a way that provides feelings of completeness and joy’ (Giacalone and Jurkiewicz 2003). Another interpretation of workplace spirituality suggests ‘employee experiences of spirituality at work’. Consistent to this interpretation (Milliman et al. 2003) focused on employees experiencing sense of meaning in work, sense of connectedness with others at work and an experience of alignment with the organizations vision and mission. The concept of work place spirituality thus includes both the aspects - offering an organizational framework with conditions and mechanisms facilitating employee experiences of workplace spirituality as well as an employee's individual experiences of spirituality at work.

Sculpting Spiritual Workplaces

Banyhamdan et.al 2012 proposed a framework providing five ‘core pillars’ or ‘pathways’ to build and maintain spiritual organization, those are: organization culture, organization's mission and vision, leadership, human resource management and development, organization structure and job design. The interaction of implementing two or more of these ‘pathways’ would definitely, bring greater impact on transformation of an organization into spirituality- based one.

Organization culture is considered a key and primary pillar in building and maintaining spiritual organization. Giacalone et al. (2003) call for "establishing a social/ organizational culture based on altruistic love whereby leaders and followers have a genuine care, concern, and appreciation for self and others, thereby producing a sense of membership and feel understood and appreciated". Since organizational culture plays a critical role in building a spiritual workplace, mission and vision statements need to institutionalize a culture based on a altruistic values of love, respect, fairness, honesty, care, compassion and the like. (Fry & Slocum Jr., 2008). Recognition and rewards also have to be based around reinforcing these values in the organization.

The terms "spiritual leadership", "moral leadership", "authentic leadership", and "ethical leadership" assert the accomplishment of a spiritual mindset in the workplace, as being a leadership responsibility. Pfeffer (2003) urges organizational leaders to assume management practices that enrich human spirit by building values. He argued that building spirit at work requires the following leadership practices: (1) emphasize mission and values over shareholder profits; (2) encourage autonomy and decision making responsibility; (3) use self-managed teams; (4) use collective forms of rewards and recognition; (5) let people be who they are, utilize and develop their gifts and skills; (6) provide a way for people to fulfill their family and other social obligations; (7) drive fear and abuse out of the workplace.

Human Resources Management (HRM) plays a strategic role to enable workplace spirituality at both individual and organizational levels. Developing an Employee Value Proposition - EVP, based on spiritual values becomes the key to success in acquiring talent. One of the main functions of HRM is the selection of new employees. According to Burack (1999), spiritual centered organizations place a large emphasis on such employee characteristics as “intellectual

(e.g. leveraging available knowledge and capabilities, learning, and planning), emotional, (e.g. interpersonal relationships and communications, teaming, feedback and emotional development), volitional, (e.g. willingness to change and good adaptability to new demands or conditions), and spiritual, (e.g. concern with ethics, empathy for people, justice and individual dignity).” Training is another vital component to any organization, especially a spiritually based organization. Neck & Milliman (1999) call for "thought self-leadership (TSL) training to help create constructive thoughts pattern and enhance employees' perceptions about work and help them develop a more purposeful vision of work, and eventually gain more spirituality in their work life". Another aspect of training, in regards to spirituality, is that some employees coming from non-spiritual based companies “have to be deprogrammed” (Wagner-Marsh & Conley, 1999).

Job crafting for individual employees offers two important contributions towards spirituality. First, puts the proactive, agentic behaviors of employees’ center-stage, conceptualizing and empirically exploring the creative and motivational bases of employees altering their jobs to improve their experience of work. Second, adds to positive organizational psychology through its focus on the range of generative outcomes of job crafting – including the experience of positive meaning and sense of self, engagement, commitment, turnover, and performance. This initiative is driven by the HR department and is a crucial link to individual spirituality. Job crafters contour the boundaries that characterize their jobs in three ways. First, job crafters may change the physical or temporal boundaries around the bundle of tasks that they consider to be their job. This is referred as ‘task crafting,’ and it consists of adding or dropping tasks, adjusting the time or effort spent on various tasks, and redesigning aspects of tasks. Second, job crafters, may use ‘relational crafting’ to redefine the interpersonal interactions involved in performing their jobs. Third, employees may reframe the cognitive boundaries that ascribe meaning to the tasks and relationships that constitute their jobs. This ‘cognitive crafting’ changes the significance and meaning of their work. To build and maintain these core pillars an organization requires an organic, adaptive, learning, boundary-less structure with low formalization, high decentralization and open communication channels throughout the organization.

Conclusion

Organizations built on the foundations of spirituality provide to all its stakeholders an environment of trust, respect, responsibility, peace and make the work place fulfilling and meaningful. The framework provided will add towards a modest contribution to the literature on this widely argued and disputed phenomenon. It would also give insights to the reasons why spirituality at workplaces is essential in a fast paced dynamic business world today. Strategic Human Resources Management could be a driving force towards sculpting spiritual workplaces.

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