

SPIRITUALITY AND PERFORMANCE IN CORPORATE ORGANIZATIONS: ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

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Abstract

An important concept which is increasingly gaining ascendancy in the field of corporate organization management, especially in the 21st century, is spirituality. Spirituality has to do with qualities of the human spirit – the search for meaning, connectedness and a sense of community as well as the exercise of love, compassion, patience and forgiveness towards others and a pursuit of life of harmony with higher powers and the universal environment. A review of literature on spirituality in organizations (Fry, 2006; Karakas, 2010; Tecchio, Cunha and Santos, 2016; and Luis, 2010) indicates that a major change is taking place in the personal and professional lives of employees as many of them deeply aspire to integrate their spirituality with their work.

Recent researches conducted in the developed countries (Pandy, Gupta, and Kumar, 2016; Garg, 2017 and Word, 2012) suggest that spirituality does not only produce beneficial personal outcomes such as increased positive human health, and psychological well-being but also delivers improved employee commitment and productivity

Although the quantum of researches on spirituality in the developing countries of Africa (e.g. Nigeria, Ghana and Uganda), where religious activities are rampant is relatively low, there appears to be a recognition of the importance of spirituality not only for individual efficacy but also for organizational survival and sustainability.

The main purpose of this paper is to examine spirituality as an animating force for positive performance in corporate organizations. The paper discusses the issues involved in spirituality, identifies the challenges and suggests strategies for integrating spirituality as a vehicle for improving individual, team and corporate organizational performance in developed and developing countries.

Introduction

Corporate organizations have become an integral part of where many people operate the greater part of their lives, performing one job or the other. To a number of people, work organization represents a place where they do not only earn money to keep their body and soul alive but a meeting point where they can share some meaningful values with people who resonate at the very core of their lives. Work has become an integral part of our lives and given the interrelatedness of work and other aspects of our lives, there is an emerging movement to engage the total person in work organizations (Lips Wiersma and Morris, 2011).

Perhaps in response to this, there has been a plethora of research centred on spirituality and performance in organizations (Benefiel, Fry and Geigle, 2014 Cheng and Yang, 2012 and Fry and Matherly, 2006).

Advocates of workplace spirituality propose that people bring unique and individual spirits to the work organization and are highly motivated by the spiritual need to experience a sense of transcendence and community in their work. There is an emerging evidence that workplace spirituality programmes not only lead to beneficial personal outcomes such as increased positive human health and psychological well being but that they also deliver improved employee commitment, productivity and reduced absenteeism and turnover (Giacalone and Jurkiewicz 2003; Fry, Vitucci and Cedillo, 2005). Much of the research reports published have been done by researchers in developed countries. In Africa, not much have been done with regards to spirituality and performance in work organizations.

The purpose of this paper is to take an overview of spirituality and performance in corporate organizations not only in developed countries but also in African countries. The rest of the paper is divided into four parts. The first section takes a review of the issues at stake concerning spirituality in organizations. The second identifies the challenges facing spirituality in organizations while the third suggest strategies to promote spirituality in the workplace in the direction that will enhance organizational and individual performance. The final section concludes the paper.

Spirituality and Performance in Organisation – Issues at Stake

In the review of spirituality in work organizations, we find a number issues which are not yet fully resolved despite the fact that research on organizational spirituality dates back to over half a century. The main areas in which we have done some review but still identify some unresolved issues concerns the concept of spirituality, the differences between spirituality and religion, the factors which induce spirituality in organizations, the dimensions of spirituality and the benefits of spirituality in organizations. We discuss below the issues concerning:

a)The concept of spirituality

There are many possible forms of workplace spirituality(Karakas, 2010).. This contributes, so that there is no clear definition of what spirituality in the workplace is in literature. For this reason, the concept of spirituality will be discussed below to then ascertain its development in the organizational environment. The term spirituality comes from the Latin word *spiritus* or *spiritualis*, which means breath. *Spiritus* is defined as an uplifting and fundamental principle to give life to physical organisms. This means that the spirit is the vital force which lives in human beings while they are alive (Garcia-Zamor, 2003).

The concept of spirituality was extended beyond religious traditions and applied to professional and organizational settings (Burack, 1999). When taking the concept of spirituality to the organizational environment, it is seen that it is characterised as having a universal aspect or,

that is, characteristics are found in different cultures and organizations. These characteristics are the essence of spirituality in organizations. One of the most important among these is the relevance attributed to moral and ethical values, such as: honesty, optimism, confidence, justice; problem solving; encouragement; intrinsic motivation and orientation for excellence (Reave, 2005).

b) Differences between Spirituality and Religion

The concept of spirituality and religion are very similar. There are two distinct perspectives related to them. In one, the two concepts are inseparable, while in the other, the terms spirituality and religion are different concepts. Spirituality and religion are considered separate terms in this study. Despite the definitive link between the topics, they are different.

Religion is concerned with a system of beliefs, ritual prayers, rituals, ceremonies and formal practices. On the other hand, spirituality is concerned with the qualities of the human spirit. Spirituality presents the following key elements: it is informal, organised or structured; is beyond religious denominations; is inclusive and includes and accepts every type of person, not being proselytic; is universal and timeless; it is an essential sources and provider of meaning and purpose in life; it is the fear that is felt in the presence of the transcendental, the sacred in everything, in everyday routine; a deep feeling of interconnection with everything; inner peace and calm; an endless source of power and commitment; it is the final essence. The main differences between religion and spirituality can be seen in the table below.

Differences between spirituality and religion

Spirituality	Religion
An inner desire and feeling of community.	A system of organised belief.
Appropriate topic of discussion in organizations.	Inappropriate topic of discussion in organizations.
Not dependent on any form of religion.	May serve as a vehicle to nurture and understand explicit spirituality.
Broader concept which represents beliefs and values.	More restricted concept, which refers to behaviour. It has dictated principles, dogmas and doctrines.
Is concerned with the qualities of the human spirit.	System of beliefs, ritual prayers, rites, ceremonies and formal practices.
Not operated in terms of affiliation or sectarian ideas.	Characterised by measures of church attendance, amount of prayer, participation at church and related activities, among others.
Parochial and exclusive.	Non-sectarian and international.

Source: Edivandro, L. Tecchio; Cristiano Jose Castro de Almeida Cunha, and Fabiana Besen Santos (2016). Spirituality in organisations. Organisational Sociology Vol. 23 No. 79.

c) Factors Inducing Spirituality in Organisations

Profound changes are in progress in the workplace and spirituality is put forward as one of the main themes. The critical ingredients to accelerate the change are becoming established. There is an important mass of knowledge and solid research, with a growing number of articles, books and other texts being disseminated (academic and popular publications); needs are being expressed by individuals; and top executives and owners of organizations are increasingly convinced of the merits of these approaches.

The main factors inducing workplace spirituality are:

1. **Looking for meaning while at work:** Work has a meaning for people, which goes beyond the material rewards associated to this (Duchon, Plowman, 2005). In as far that the activities performed at an organization are in line with spiritual values, they provide meaning to an individual. As they develop behaviour which demonstrates values, such as integrity, courage, honesty, kindness, confidence and self-discipline or other forms that express spirituality in organizational interactions, as well as behaviour that could be translated into benefits for clients or the organization, individuals may find meaning when performing their work (Driver, 2007). Therefore, work is no longer something disconnected from personal development. Individuals seek to transcend simple economic exchanges. They try to connect their professional life with their spiritual life; form communities in the workplace and seek a unified vision and purpose for their lives, which goes much further beyond financial gain.
2. **Improved organizational performance:** Many organizations encourage spirituality, as they believe that a humanised workplace creates a win-win situation, where both workers and the organization benefit (Garcia-Zamor, 2003). When integrating spirituality in organizational management, the following is sought: 1) attaining a competitive advantage through ethical behaviour, job satisfaction, committed workers and productivity (Benefiel, 2010); and 2) increasing organizational commitment, which may lead to improved organizational performance (Rego, Cunha, 2008).
3. **Reaction to corporate greed:** Spiritual awakening in the workplace is presented as a reaction to the corporate greed of the 1980s (Garcia-Zamor, 2003). Downsizing, re-engineering and dismissals during the 1990s made the workplace somewhere where workers were demoralised and where there was a growing injustice in relation to salaries. Often, people earn money but their personal values fall behind. With this, many workers leave the corporate world and those who stay tend to incorporate their personal values into their professional lives and, consequently, their work routines.
4. **Need to connect with other people:** organizational models of bureaucratic and scientific administration which recommend specialisation led to isolation and alienation between workers. In contrast, spirituality arose at work because people want to feel connected with what is important and they want to feel connected with every person at work.

d)Dimensions of Spirituality in Organisations

Having set the foundations of this collective process, we now briefly discuss each of the following spiritual dimensions and their relationships. We refer interested readers to these researches (Fry, 2003, Kotter, 1996, and Daniel, 2010) for more elaborate discussions of these constructs.

Vision

Vision became an important topic in the leadership literature in the 1980s as leaders were forced to pay greater attention to the future direction of their organizations due to intense global competition, shortened development cycles for technology, and strategies becoming more rapidly outdated by competition (Conger & Kanungo, 1998). Vision refers to a picture of the future with some implicit or explicit commentary on why people should strive to create that future. Vision serves the three important functions of clarifying the general direction of change, simplifying the multitude of more detailed decisions, and helping to quickly and efficiently coordinate actions. A powerful vision has broad appeal, defines the unit's destination and

journey, reflects high ideals, gives meaning to work, and encourages hope and faith (Daft & Lengel, 1998; Nanus, 1992). In small military units that must have high levels of task cohesion, vision is central to achieving unity of effort (DA, 2008a).

Altruistic love

For spiritual organisational spirituality and leadership, altruistic love is defined as a sense of wholeness, harmony, and well-being produced through care, concern, and appreciation for both self and others (Fry, 2003). There are great emotional and psychological benefits from separating love, or care and concern for others, from need, which is the essence of giving and receiving unconditionally. Both the medical and positive psychology fields have found that love has the power to overcome the negative influence of destructive emotions such as fear and anger (Allen, 1972; Jones, 1995; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Underlying this definition are values such as integrity, patience, kindness, forgiveness, acceptance, gratitude, humility, courage, trust, loyalty, and compassion.

As a component of organizational culture, altruistic love defines the set of values, assumptions, and ways of thinking considered to be morally right that are shared by group members and taught to new members (Klimoski & Mohammad, 1994; Schein, 2004).

Hope/faith

Hope is a desire with expectation of fulfillment. Faith adds certainty to hope. It is a firm belief in something for which there is no empirical evidence. It is based on values, attitudes, and behaviors that demonstrate certainty and trust that what is desired and expected will come to pass. People with hope/faith possess clarity of where they are going, how to get there, and are willing to face opposition and endure hardships in order to achieve their goals (MacArthur, 1998). Hope/faith is thus the source for the conviction that the organization's vision, purpose, and mission will be fulfilled. Often the metaphor of a race is used to describe faith working or in action, comprised of the vision and expectation of reward or victory and the joy of the journey of preparing for and running the race itself (MacArthur, 1998).

Spiritual well-being

The manifestation of workplace spirituality and good leadership is higher group spiritual well-being; specifically the level of group calling and membership. Fleischman (1994), Maddock and Fulton (1998), and Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003) present two primary aspects of workplace spiritual well-being: 1) a sense of transcendence, calling or being called (vocationally), and 2) a need for social connection or membership.

Calling

Calling refers to the experience of transcendence or how one makes a difference through service to others and, in doing so, derives meaning and purpose in life. People seek not only competence and mastery through their work but also a sense that work has some social meaning or value (Pfeffer, 2003). The term calling has long been used as one of the defining characteristics of a professional.

Professionals in general have expertise in a specialized body of knowledge, ethics centered on selfless service to clients/customers, an obligation to maintain quality standards within the profession, calling to their field, dedication to their work, and a strong commitment to their careers (Fillee, House, & Kerr, 1976).

Membership

Membership encompasses the cultural and social structures we are immersed in and through which we seek, what William James(the founder of modern psychology, in his classic *The Varieties of Religious Experience*) (James, 2002)determined to be man's most fundamental need - to be understood and appreciated. A sense of being understood and appreciated largely stems from interrelationships and connections through social interaction with and membership in groups. Indeed in organizations, people value their affiliations and sense of interconnection or belonging to part of a larger community (Pfeffer, 2003), which in the military manifests in *esprit de corps*.

Spiritual leadership positively influences spiritual well-being as group members model the values of altruistic love to one another as they jointly develop a common vision, which generates hope/faith and a willingness to “do what it takes” in pursuit of a vision of transcendent service to key stakeholders (Fry, 2003, 2005a). This in turn produces a sense of calling which gives one a sense that one's life has meaning, purpose and makes a difference. Concurrently, as leaders and followers engage in this process and gain a sense of mutual care and concern, members gain a sense of membership and feel understood and appreciated.

e)The benefits of Spirituality in Organizations

Although not all researchers agree that spirituality favours all the stakeholders in an organization, a great number of researchers (Garcia Zamor, 2003, Marguis 2008, Gibbons, 2000 and Dent Higgins, 2005) subscribe to the notion that spirituality fosters organisational health and welfare. Apart from being productive and efficient, the worker wants to find meaning in his work. The envisioned separation between professional and personal life is shown to be inefficient, as it is observed that personal life affects activities performed in the workplace. This leads organizations to set up programmes that aim to balance the various aspects of workers' lives.

Recognising workplace spirituality is admitting that people take more than their bodies and minds with them, as they carry individual talents and unique spirits. The organizations that ignore this basic fact, inherent to human nature over time, now explore spiritual concepts, such as confidence, harmony, values and honesty, with the aim of attaining their objectives. Executives and workers seek to introduce a set of practices in the field of organizational spirituality or, in other words, practices that promote satisfaction, increased quality and production, with positive reflections in the financial area, particularly on return on investment.

Other benefits of spirituality in organizations include:

- Reduction in vices in the workplace, a deeper feeling of the meaning and purpose at work, sense of community, increased well-being and loyalty.
- Increased morale, sense of belonging to the organization.
- Increased productivity and creativity
- Reduction in stress
- Greater commitment to the organization
- Increased happiness
- Greater job satisfaction
- Greater involvement with work and increased self-esteem
- Lower staff turnover

Challenges facing Spirituality in Organisations

The following challenges have been identified as serious challenges facing spirituality in corporate organisations.

Measurement Difficulties

Measurement difficulties have been identified by some researchers regarding measuring spirituality under positivist model. Gozdz (2000) argue that various researched work conform largely with logical positivism of orthodox science of the western world. This suggest that “what are being investigated” are external, the material, the objective and the empirically verifiable. However, we are of the view that spirituality in organizations can be measured by subjecting it to qualitative form of data analysis.

Problem of Proselytism

Proselytism poses a serious challenge to expression of individual spirituality at the workplace as there is a risk of an attempt at proselyting individuals of other religious views. This may result in the use of spiritual belief and doctrine to exclude others: and by so doing, undermine the requirement for respect for diversity and inclusiveness at work.

Discontentment by Some Workers

There is a likelihood for feeling of discontentment which may lead some workers to frustration because they may be denied room to express their own spirituality. An effort by a manager to indoctrinate his subordinate will be viewed as a coercion, which may lead to alienation by the employees. Hence it can be resisted there by resulting in division and having harmful effects on the workers.

Religious Fanaticism

There is danger of the emergence of a group with similar religious interest that eventually erupt into an explosive terrorist group that do not respect diversity of spirituality with intention to subdue and nullify other beliefs. Example of these on Nigeria was Maitasine incident and in the recent time Boko Haram whose pursuit was to impose their religious beliefs on others in Nigeria.

Challenge of Compatibility

For organization whose employees are driven by “material interest” may not easily embrace an incorporation of spirituality in the workplace. The present societies in the world are characterized by material pursuit which conflicts with organization goals in the contest of spirituality. Hence, the possibility to legitimately and openly resist spirituality incorporation at workplace (Brown, 2003; and Mirvis, 1997). Besides, some egoistic managers may be displeased about spirituality at workplace fearing that it may weaken them if they allow it. Therefore, in other to protect their power and status quo, they will resist spirituality at their workplaces.

Low Spirituality of Leadership

Leadership without strong spirituality base may not be capable of steering an organizational ship. Such leadership may be corrupt, lacking the necessary vision and pose as a source of discouragement to the employees. Some organizations have failed as a result of their poor leadership and low spirituality base. Examples include, Anderson, Enron, and FIFA..

Increasing lawlessness in the Society

The workplace is a unity in a larger society. Thus the attitude of the members of organisation will mirror the larger society to which it belongs. The pervasive evils of ungodliness in the world today, points to the fact that employees and managers who imbibed the evils of the larger society would resist the incorporation of spirituality at work.

Inadequate Organisational interest on Trainings related to Spirituality

Organizations invest so much in developing workers' skills on their job but in the majority spends a little or nothing on developing their workers' spiritual base. Some organization at the extreme, do not embrace the concept of spirituality at workplace and hence has no provision in their agenda for it.

Strategies for Promoting Spirituality and Performance in Organisation

The following strategies are hereby suggested as vehicles towards effective performance of individuals and groups in organisational settings.

Clear and Compelling Vision

First, organizations must have a "clear and compelling vision of where they want to be in the near to distant future" (Fry, 2003, p.718). This vision should portray a journey that will give followers a sense of calling, of one's life having meaning, and making a difference. It should get followers excited about coming to work and give meaning to that work so that followers leave feeling more committed to the organization than ever. This vision should reflect high ideals that encourage both faith and hope in followers (Fry, 2003).

Shared Responsibility to Promote Organisational Culture that Incorporate Spirituality

Organizations must have a culture that is aligned with spirituality and spiritual leadership framework. This culture must embody the idea of altruistic love that provides both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. The culture of spiritual leadership is one in which leaders and followers share responsibility. Ideas can come from anywhere and followers can become self-directed and empowered teams that replace vertical structures and functional boundaries (Fry, 2003). The culture becomes one where power is delegated to this enlightened team in which followers understand how their jobs are relevant to the organization's performance and vision/mission. Team members in this type of culture are challenged to persevere and do what it takes in order to meet challenging goals through hope and faith in the vision of the organization, their leaders, and themselves. The participation in these team efforts manifests followers who experience a sense of membership through recognition and celebration and who feel understood and appreciated (Fry, 2003).

Spiritual and Authentic Leadership

Organizations must choose a leader who walks in front of one when someone needs to follow, behind one when someone needs encouragement, and beside one when someone needs a friend (Fry, 2003). Since this leader is at the heart of the vision and culture of the organization, perhaps this is the most vital step. Spiritual leaders are people who are often considered to be inspirational, visionary, and can move beyond barriers and limitations (Sikula & Sikula, 2005). These leaders concentrate on higher-order needs and try to build inspirational involvement of followers into the organization. Such leaders must be authentic.

An authentic leader is someone who is genuine in true to what they believe in. they understand the purpose of leadership, they lead with very consistent values, and with their heart, as well as their head. They have courage, compassion, empathy—qualities life that – and they build long-term connected relationships. And they have the personal self-discipline to deliver extraordinary results from their teams.

Authentic leaders are givers and they know their role is to serve. They're there to serve all their constituents— their customers, their employees, their shareholders, and their communities, and they do it all simultaneously. Those are the kind of true north leaders that I think are going to be effective in the 21st century and that we need to be selecting to head up companies.

Tolerance of Various Spiritual Paths

Spiritual diversity in an organization indicates that employees belong to different spiritual paths. Some may belong to Christian religions such as Catholics, Anglicans, Pentecostals, Methodist and such like. While others be practicing Muslims. There could be those practicing other forms of religion not identified either of the two mentioned above.

Management or organizations should exhibit high level of tolerance for various spiritual paths being practiced by employees (Aahad, Junaidah & Yusof, 2013). However, it should make sure that an employee's spiritual path does not conflict with the vision and goals of the organization. The spirituality of some workers would naturally drive him toward positive goal attainment which ultimately agree with organizational goals.

Installing Positive Values of Compassions, Love and diligence

Compassion connotes strong feeling of empathy for those who are suffering while love connotes a strong feeling of deep affection for others. Management should develop a culture that promotes act of compassions founded on love towards people without spiritual base (Aahad, Junaidah & Yusof, 2013). This should be manifested through exercise of diligence in management's actions and dealings with them. This, in turn, will produce work environment where people would show real care and concern for each other not minding diversity of spirituality, beliefs and faiths. This will lead to culture of trust and team work spirit within the organization. The management could strengthen this culture by encouraging group work, openness and discourage acts of nepotism, favouritism, tribalism, sectism, facism and sectionalism.

Encourage merit as a precursor for corporate reward

The view express by many management writers is that merit should be rewarded as against nepotism, tribalism, favouritism, and such like. The management should merit as yardstick to reward diligence by employees in the spirit of fairness irrespective of spiritual path. This will eliminate disaffection among workers.

Respect for Diversity

Diversity in the workplace demands for respect for individual differences. Since spirituality is purely individual and idiosyncratic experience, it becomes necessary that spirituality practices be customized on the principle of valuing and respecting other peoples beliefs and views. Identifying and upholding a group's religious framework will counter-productive. A culture of respect for diversity of beliefs and faiths should be promoted in the workplace by enforcing codes of conducts and as well as ensuring values of tolerance and love.

Openness and Freedom of expression

Employees should be able to speak openly and express their inner feelings, values and spirituality regardless of fear, alienation or exclusion (Milliman, Czaplewski, and Ferguson, 2003; Thompson, 2000).

Dealing with employees as whole persons

There is need to recognize and notice each employee's emotional, intellectual and spiritual needs, values, priority and preferences. It is important to see people as spiritual beings and take into cognition their spiritual lives and value and richness of their collective potential. Leigh (1997) contends that workplace spirituality commences with the recognition that workers do not bring only their bodies and minds to work: but also their hearts, souls, creativity, talents and unique spirits.

Provision of Training on Organisational Spirituality

Management should design and develop programmes on 'spirituality at workplace' aimed at enlightenment to eliminate spirituality discontentment and conflicts among workers: but encourage accommodation of differences in beliefs.

Development of Spiritual Leadership

It is important to develop the leadership in the domain of 'spiritual leadership'. This will help to guide the managers through the spiritual base they have received and will consequently influence their decision and role performance for the overall good of the organization.

Conclusion

In the foregoing sections of this paper, attention has been focused mainly on spirituality and how, from the rational point of view, it foster organisational health and welfare. Investigations and actions developed in corporate organisations tended to disregard the emotional side of human beings. Since human beings are both emotional and rational, there is a feeling by some people that the emotional aspect of individual employees who may not buy into the idea of spirituality are not given total need. The body, mind and spirit integrate to constitute the human being. A review of various researches reveal that the spirituality in the organization has come to stay mainly because of the values that are perceived to accrue to groups and the organisation as a whole.

However, all is not done with respect to the impact of spirituality on all facets of organisational, group and individual performance. This is largely because of the misconception of spirituality for religion in organization. It is the view of this paper, that efforts be made by organisational managers and leadership to promote workplace spirituality in a manner to unleash the highest potentials of various individuals that populate corporate organisations towards optimal performance for the good of all the stakeholders.

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