

Workplace Spirituality: an effective HR to enhance Productivity

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Abstract

It is a bit difficult to imagine a high profile CEO, who is a no-nonsense person with an eye for meeting deadlines and targets, trying to attain Corporate Nirvana. However Workplace Spirituality has gained significance recently because people today are not attracted only to monetary benefits but also believes in nourishing the soul at their workplace where they spend major part of their day. It is believed that Spirituality can help encompass belief in immaterial realities or the transcendent nature of the world. These values and investment in improving the inner conscious of the people in the organization will pay off as they will form the base to overcome the global management crisis and will eventually bring about human prosperity. Many Organizations who had suffered debacles and crisis due to non-ethical behavior of their employees and there is proof how the situation improved due to the impact of workplace spirituality. Thus we see that sensitizing the staff towards spirituality can reap huge benefits for the Organization. The paper is a content analysis based paper and the researcher has used secondary data to understand and dwell into the significance of practicing Workplace Spirituality. The origin of the concept, its benefits to the Corporate as well as different the spirituality models and methods adopted by various different organizations are understood. Researcher has tried to understand why many organizations and their CEO's have made such programmes compulsory and how the entire organization structure benefits when employees have a spiritual bent of mind. The research paper shows how spiritual people are more loyal, dedicated, and passionate committed employers and employees.

Key Words: *spirituality, Values, workplace, performance, commitment, satisfaction, empirical*

Introduction

Spirituality and Meditation can be referred to an ultimate sort of immaterial reality. It is the inner path that will enable a person to discover the essence of his/her being. Spiritual practices include meditation, prayer and contemplation and are intended to develop an individual's inner life. Spirituality serves as a source of inspiration or orientation in life. It can encompass belief in immaterial realities or the transcendent nature of the world.

What is Workplace Spirituality?

Oswick(2009) compared the two 10 year periods ending in 1998 and 2008 and found the number of books on workplace spirituality increased from 17 to 55 and the number of journal articles increased from 40 to 192. Karakas (2009) reviewed the literature and found 70 definitions of spirituality at work. Most definitions make the distinction between religion and spirituality. Covey (2011) proposed the following: "The word spiritual has its roots in spirit, for which dictionaries provide many definitions, most of which are nonreligious in nature, such as 'disposition of mind or outlook' or 'a mental disposition characterized by firmness or assertiveness.' Thesauruses likewise put forward many synonyms for spirit including disposition, courage, determination, vigor, will, moral fiber, heart, enthusiasm, inner self, fortitude, and strength. Combine the dictionary definitions with these synonyms, and that is what I am referring to here when speaking of young people's spirits, or spiritual needs."

Spirituality in workplace means different things to different people. Their understanding and interpretation will solely depend on their interest, background, and discipline. Different scholars define spirituality at workplaces as either practicing the values of integrity, passion, cooperation, ethics, commitment, loyalty and tolerance at the workplace. However the dominant view seems to be -

- a spirit of connectedness
- a search of depth of meaning
- a greater sense of life purpose of the employees

All these will help the employees to create a balance in the otherwise shifting sands of the materialistic world. In normal discussions and references it is quite natural to use the word spirituality and religion synonymously. One thing is clear that spirituality in the workplace is not the same as religion. There is a sharp underlying difference between the two.

1. Religion is too narrow and is mostly dogmatic in nature.
2. Spirituality is too broad, inclusive and less burdened with ideological baggage of the religion. There can be a great deal of connectedness, spiritedness, and understanding among the employees at workplace without being bogged down by religious convictions.

Can Workplace Spirituality exist?

Can you imagine a high profile CEO, who is a no-nonsense person and has an eye for meeting deadlines and targets to attain Corporate Nirvana?

Aren't "spirituality" and "business" two very different roads that shall never cross each other?

Earlier workplaces were viewed as a place where one earned their bread and butter and not a place to nourish one's soul. Employees never considered the workplace as their own. The result being the workplaces had robbed the employees of all the joy and pleasure of bringing their soul, body, and spirit in a place where they spend a major part of their life.

Employers today are aware that there are many other things that motivate an employee than just a fat salary. Money which was earlier regarded as the single most motivator is now a thing of the past.

Proofs of the existence of spiritual bankruptcy in workplaces

Financial improprieties in Global Giants of Enron, Worldcom, Arthur Anderson and the resultant public shaming and widespread discontent of the stakeholders have made organizations wake to become more ethical. It is becoming increasingly important for people in corporate to behave ethically. Reports of Nikes sweatshop, squalid work conditions, and measly wages paid to overseas workers came in for widespread criticism many years ago. The damning revelation saw its earnings tumble by 27%. Seen in this context, good governance, treating the stake holders in a caring and impartial manner, and being a responsible corporate citizen has become very important in the present times.

Scenario in India

Back home, Companies like Godrej, Vardhaman group, Eicher, Indian Oil Corporation, and Birla group have demonstrated their commitment to providing good corporate governance and making the society a better place to live in. Two companies-Wipro and Infosys have demonstrated to the world at large that a good corporate governance practices can put the business on high

pedestal. The CEO's of both these corporate Azim Premji and Narayan Murthy have demonstrated personal ethics and morale of such a tall order that imbibing the spirit of the same throughout the Organizational structure almost becomes compulsory.

The trend report discovered that 75% of the consumers interviewed say they are more likely to gravitate towards brands associated with a good cause if price and quality being the same. In India, Birlas, Godrej, and Tata's have demonstrated high level of social consciousness.

Genesis of spirituality in workplace – The Origin

Workplace spirituality is no new phenomenon. It existed in ancient times also. Infact there is a Hebrew word "avadah" which includes among other things, work and love. There are references abound in Kautilya's Arthashastra about spiritual practices embraced by the yesteryears kings in India. Arthashastra highlights the intellectual inputs and advice sought by kings from the raja guru, who in turn referred to scriptures, which was based on dharma. Little wonder, the entire kingdom was Dharmic and the Rajgurus enjoyed pre-eminent position in many famed kingdoms.

Bhagavad Gita is another unceasing fountain of knowledge of spiritual practices which are relevant in our contemporary society even today. Business in the eighteenth and nineteenth century were established and run on loving and Spiritual principles. The popular Cadbury founded by Quaker was, run on loving principles. Somehow somewhere along the twentieth century, business and spirituality became separate areas.

In twentieth century, business was dominated by men and we know, men are more inclined towards left-brain thinking. Thus Corporate houses became more obsessed with left-brain perspectives like strategic planning, performance management, reasoning, analytical thinking, total quality management, financial results, and profits.

Today things are changing and there is a influx of women in the corporate world and with them they bring in their Compassion, Spirituality, love, empathy and all the aspects of the right – brain perspectives which is always associated with women. Hence we can say that the advent of the new women dominated corporate world will lead to a more balanced and spiritual workplace.

Why does a Spiritual workplace benefit both the employee and organization?

Spirited organizations are aware of the inherent benefits that spirituality will accrue to all the stake holders. Employees can get an ample opportunity to unleash their creative potentialities. There is scope for personal and organizational transformation is immense. Increased ethical behavior is also observed in spiritually dominated workplaces. A Spiritual Workspace creates a climate of trust, loyalty, open, honest and authentic communication and commitment among the members of the organization. The employees appreciate each other's point of view and beliefs.

There is ample opportunity to morph into a close, well-knit community of mutual care, help, and service. Such communities have a greater sense of purpose. Reduced absenteeism, Enhanced productivity and Enhanced job satisfaction levels.

Spirituality at workplace helps employees to be in-sync with the source of creativity. Creativity will flourish when the spirit expresses itself bountifully. A creative mind can create world-class products that will enhance human life.

Spirited workplaces will help the company earn the sobriquet of "great place to work." "Employer of choice" is a tag the employer can wear proudly. In a highly commoditized job market, where the war for talent is fiercely raging, spirited companies can retain the best talent within the company. Personal satisfaction of the employees also enhances in such organizations. A study commissioned by Wilson learning company found that the majority of Americans (47%) cited spirituality as their most important source of happiness, next only to health.

How various Indian companies are reaching out to Workplace Spirituality?

Businesses houses are well aware of the potential benefits that the spirited workplace can deliver. Companies are allowing study and prayer groups in their confines. Some companies organize high-power lunches.

Chaplains and Spiritual Guru's are being roped in by companies to spread spirituality. Many a company invest sizeable amount in hosting conferences, workshop and symposium on spirituality at work. Companies also help employees learn Meditation, Yoga, Taichi, Pranayama, Visioning exercises, and Auto-suggestions\self-dialogue.

Meditation has the power to tame our mind and attain inner Calmness. This will help employees to step up their productivity. In India, Maharishi institute of management studies conducts such programmes for the benefit of corporate Leaders. Companies like Reckitt & Colomon, Indian Petro Chemicals, Tata Tea and Tata chemicals are the beneficiaries of such programmes.

Art of living courses by Sri Sri Ravishankar foundation is also gaining acceptance among managers these days. Vipassana- a10 day programme has found favor with companies like Wipro, Dabur, Varn organics.

Surprisingly, such programmes are open to not only the managers but also to the members of trade union. Such programmes might help bring about calmness in the mind of the union members. They become mindful of their responsibilities towards the stakeholders. The programme will also enable the managers to take a compassionate stand towards their sub-ordinates, and colleagues resulting in better human relations. Many a companies in India thus follows the new-age principles, which has its roots in Indian ethos to increase the spiritual heft in the organization.

- Meditation for better stress management,
- Purushartta for achieving balance between professional and personal life,
- Yoga for healthy, disease-free life

These are some of the oft-used new age principles that are finding its way in to the otherwise soulless, lifeless corporate.

If Indian Companies can borrow new-age principles from Vedic precepts and practice it religiously, can the western world be left far behind?

Apple computers in California have a separate meditation room where employees can meditate for half-an-hour every day to keep the stress at bay. Prentice-hall publishing company has "quiet room" where employees can meditate in calm, quiet, and relaxed manner to bust their stress. Xerox Company has its own spiritual retreat called "vision quest." Vision quest helps employees commune with nature. Microsoft has its own on-line spiritual service to shoo the work-related blues away.

Values that are demonstrated when Spirituality is practiced in Organizations
Spirituality is shown in a workplace when the following activities are included

- Bereavement programs.
- Wellness information displayed and distributed.
- Employee Assistance Programs.
- Programs that integrate work/family.
- Management systems that encourage personal and spiritual transformation.
- Servant leadership – the desire to serve others first in preference to self.

- Stewardship – leadership practices that support growth and well-being of others.
- Diversity programs that create inclusive cultures.
- Integration of core values and core business decisions and practices.
- Leadership practices that support the growth and development of all employees.

Need for Workplace Spirituality

The corporate world is realizing the need for Workplace Spirituality as there is ample evidence from various Corporate in America where such spirituality programs have helped soothe the workers psyches and enhanced productivity

Though many critics say this is yet another management fad which will die its natural death in the course of time many researches prove otherwise. A recent research project by McKinsey & Co. Australia shows that companies engaging in programs which use spiritual techniques for their employees, show improved productivity and reduced turnover.

A Spiritual Audit of Corporate America, by Jossey-Bass, was the first empirical study of the issue of Workplace Spirituality, found that spiritual employees are less fearful, do not compromise on their values, and are whole heartedly involved into their jobs. Professor Ian I. Mitroff, the book's co-author, University of Southern California Marshall School of Business says "Spirituality could be the ultimate competitive advantage. 60% of those polled for the book voted positively for the beneficial effects of spirituality in the workplace.

Ensuring that Religion is not mixed with Spirituality is the biggest concern. Even in an era that accepts spirituality in the true spirit, the thought of religion seeping into secular corporate institutions, makes many uneasy. Apparent demonstrations of their own religious sentiments and suggests against others religious or spiritual celebrations is not acceptable.

The concern is valid as The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission reports a 29% discrimination charges in corporate in USA, since 1992, are religious-based after sexual harassment and disability.

Global Scenario - Businesses Benefit from a Low-key Spirituality

Shoemaker Timberland Co.'s chief executive, Jeffrey B. Swartz, is an orthodox Jew gives a lot of importance to community service as it is integral to his faith. Hence, all employees at Timberland get 40 hours a year off to volunteer at the charity of their choice.

When Kris Kalra, a workoholic chief executive of BioGenex, realized that working all seven days a week and expecting his employees to do the same was a failure as his businesses started declining, he turned to the Bhagavad Gita, the Hindu holy text, which offers the best lessons for steering a business out of trouble. He took a three month sabbatical to study the Bhagavad Gita for eight hours a day. When he returned to work, he started listening to other people's ideas. Later he could successfully get 12 patents approved and increased business.

Ben Cohen, cofounder of Ben & Jerry's Homemade ice cream company stressed in the federal budget the need for ethics in business. Cohen and his partner Jerry Greenfield developed a strategy where in they saw how many people they had helped at the end of each month and compared it to how much money they had made. They obtain all of their milk and cream from Vermont dairy farms and believe in using sustainable rain-forest products in their ice cream products. Though critics say it's a marketing strategy of doing "nice things" to increase the sale of Ben & Jerry's Homemade ice cream. However they have advocated that they only did what they believed in and it coincidentally happened to have a positive effect on their sales. Cohen believes actions based on deeply held values by corporate builds customer loyalty.

Taco Bell, Pizza Hut, and subsidiaries of Wal-Mart Stores are now hiring spiritual experts who work as 24-hour God squads and visit employees in hospitals, deal with nervous breakdown and suicide threats. They even provide service for saying worker's wedding vows or deliver the eulogy at a funeral.

Gone is the old taboo against talking about God at work. If CEO's had tried any of this a decade back in the western countries, they probably would have been ridiculed. However today various MNC's have executives from various cultural backgrounds who discuss the lessons from churches, temples, and mosques and their religious faith more frequently and it is seen as a normal thing to do.

Recent trends

A study by Human Resource Executive magazine in 2002 revealed that only 10 percent of companies said they had a formal religion accommodation policy, and only one in five said they allowed meetings in the workplace for prayer or religious purposes. However today there is greater acceptance of spirituality at workplace.

Don McCormick, a business professor at the University of Redlands, who teaches a course on spirituality in the workplace attributes this new openness to religion to the increase in number of lawsuits in the late 1990s by workers who felt their religious rights were being infringed as Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 bans religious discrimination in the workplace.

Richard Goosen, a professor of entrepreneurial strategy and finance at Trinity Western University's business school and CEO of M and A Capital Corp. firmly believes that spiritually should be part of entrepreneurship curricula. He has presented spiritual approach model wherein the pursuit of entrepreneurship is intervened with finding the meaning of life and in which entrepreneurship is the vehicle to achieve this spirituality.

Conclusion

The recent trends have shown that Spirituality taken in a positive way at workplace is the best hope to make the world a better place. Adopting spiritual values helps in improving the inner conscious of the staff in the organization and this will prove beneficial in the long run, as they will form the base to overcome the global management crisis and will eventually bring about human prosperity. The various examples of Indian and foreign corporate show that encouraging and motivating the employees towards spirituality will bring great benefits for the Organization. Hence today various firms are turning towards incorporating spirituality to increase loyalty and commitment towards their jobs.

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