

Spirituality at Workplace: As Seen by Indian Managers

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The purpose of this article is to explore how spirituality is perceived by the managers in India. Thus, attributes of spiritual individuals and its impact at workplace are also explored. Qualitative thematic analysis of thirty in depth interviews was done to generate the unique Indian perspective on workplace spirituality. The participants in the interview process were full time managers of various Indian organizations holding positions like Vice President HR, Senior Manager HR etc. The major findings of the qualitative interviews were that workplace spirituality is a belief in sacred power which guides towards the ethical path. It helps in nurturing a positive, peaceful and compassionate environment at workplace .

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Introduction

Workplace Spirituality as a field of inquiry is young and relatively new (Sheep, 2006; Gotsis & Kortezi, 2008). Till date there is no universal definition of workplace spirituality (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2008). Extant literature from West investigating spirituality at workplace has defined it as a highly personal construct involving values, wholeness and connectedness with the larger world (Gibbons, 2000). Almost every researcher accepts that spirituality is a multidimensional construct and it involves service-oriented mentality, community-orientation, compassion and forgiveness, morality and meaning (Mahoney & Graci, 1999). Based on the review of existing literature work Petchsawang & Duchon (2009) identified five major dimensions of spirituality: a) compassion, b) meaningful work, c) mindfulness, d) compassion and e) transcendence. Many other researchers have identified similar components of spirituality as identified by Mahoney and Graci (1999).

Referring to the constructs of spirituality in details compassion involves sympathy (Twigg & Parayitam, 2006), mu-

tual caring (Delgado, 2005) and a will to relieve the sufferers from the suffering. Meaningful work is an experience in which one finds his/her work as a significant and meaningful part of his life. This meaning gives a sense of joy and goes far beyond the materialistic rewards (Duchon & Plowman, 2005). Mindfulness is a state of inner consciousness in which one is completely aware of his/her thoughts and actions (Baer, Smith, & Allen, 2004). This inner consciousness helps him/her to control and manifest emotions and behavior in a better way. Connection has been defined as a sense of connection with coworkers and anonymous others (Duchon & Plowman, 2005), and Transcendence is a sense of being in connection with some higher power not necessarily God (Delaney, 2005). This connection is believed to bring positive energy, transcendence and feeling of bliss in an individual.

Saroglou, Pichon, Trompette, Verschueren & Dernelle (2005) found that spiritual people often display helping behavior towards all sentient beings including anonymous others, hence, indicating that spiritual people are more likely to develop a culture which nourishes cooperation and collaboration among the coworkers ultimately leading to harmonious relationship among them. This harmonious relationship increases the overall satisfaction at workplace and reduced intention to quit (Podsakoff, Ahearne & MacKenzie, 1998).

Spirituality at workplace is driven by the personal values and beliefs rather than some religious ideology (Mitroff &

Denton, 1999). In details it includes efforts aiming at achieving the ultimate purpose of one's life, developing a strong sense of relatedness with one's coworkers and having concordance between personal and organizational values and beliefs (Mitroff & Denton, 1999). Literature mentions that workplaces which foster spirituality perform better than those who do not. Neck and Milliman (1994) found that spirituality is positively related to organizational performance. Organizations promoting the spiritual well-being of their employees are high on creativity, performance, satisfaction and organizational commitment (Brandt, 1996; McCormick, 1994).

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Spirituality has been majorly studied in the western context (Petchsawang & Duchon, 2009). Only two significant studies measuring spirituality in eastern context are evident, one explores spirituality in Thailand (Petchsawang & Duchon, 2009) and the other in Indian contexts exploring the meaning of spiritual orientation (Singh & Premarajan, 2007). The study of Singh and Premarajan (2007) identifies six components of spiritual orientation. These are: a) service towards mankind, b) feeling of peace, c) being vision, d) inter connectedness, e) respect for others and f) self-awareness. Whereas the components identified by Petchsawang & Duchon (2009) are a) compassion, b) meaningful work, c) mind-

fulness, d) compassion and e) transcendence. Since the factors identified in the two studies are different it gives us opportunity to explore the meaning of spirituality in the Indian context.

Thus, the knowledge obtained from previous research gives us opportunities to explore a few rarely explored questions such as meaning of workplace spirituality in Indian contexts as perceived by Indian employees. Is spirituality perceived different from religion of an individual? What is the impact of spiritual individual at the workplace? Hence, the aim of this study is: a) identify the meaning of workplace spirituality as perceived by Indian employees and b) identifying the attributes of a spiritual individual and its impact on workplace.

Spirituality at Work

Spirituality differs from individual to individual and context to context (Sheep, 2006: 358). As identified by Freke (2000) spirituality encases selflessness, love, morality, acceptance, personal growth, forgiveness, positivity. Spiritual has been defined as: a) something related to one's inner self, b) basic value which anchors all other values, c) core of life which guides you, and d) transcendental dimension of human nature (Thibault, Ellor & Netting, 1991). Spirituality includes sense of community, spiritual connection and meaningfulness in work (Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2006). At large workplace spirituality covers a sense of connectedness with coworkers, meaningfulness in work, compassion and love, belief in transcendental power (Mitroff

& Denton, 1999; Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Petchsawang & Duchon, 2009).

As spirituality is a contextual phenomenon and it varies from individual to individual and culture to culture, thus it becomes relevant to explore the meaning of spirituality in the Indian context. Scholars studying spirituality have unanimously emphasized the importance of inner self while explaining spirituality. Since the concept of self and identity is different in India as compared to western context (Wolter, 2012; Wallace, 2001). In the West creator and the created are distinct like potter and the pots; on the contrary in the East the creator is not distinct from the created (Wolter, 2012). Hence, it becomes relevant to explore the meaning of spirituality in Indian context.

India is a secular country comprising four major religions namely Hindu, Muslims, Christian and Sikhs unlike West where the majority of the population is Christian. Thus, this demographic scenario can generate different understanding about spirituality as compared to West. Apart from demographic differences Indians are on the higher side of the collectivist dimension as compared to the West (Hofstede, 1983). We divide the culture on the basis of collectivist and individualistic similarly at individual level it is allocentrism and idiocentrism, respectively (Triandis, Leung, Villareal & Clack, 1985). Allocentrism encases individual who has higher sense of belongingness, compassion and dependence in groups whereas idiocentrism is more independent, unique

and self-reliant (as cited in Robert & Wasti, 2001)

The theoretical underpinning of why perception of self and reality will be different in different context is rooted in sense making theory which proposes that reality is muddled between time and space (as cited in Dervin, 1998). There are differences and gaps in the time frame and cultural structures which changes reality depending on culture and time. These differences generate various realities of self and the world surrounding it. Hence, sense making theory helps in interpreting and deriving meaning about self and the surrounding world (Weick, 1995).

Rationale for the Study

The major objective of this paper is to gain in depth understanding of how spirituality is perceived by the Indian employees. Building on extant literature on spirituality (Petchsawang & Duchon, 2009; Singh & Premarajan, 2007) we make an attempt to contribute to the shared understanding of spirituality in Indian context. Thus, the aims of the study are:

- Identifying the meaning of workplace spirituality as perceived by Indian employees.
- Identifying the attributes of a spiritual individual, exploring the impact of spiritual individual at workplace

Participants

Participants in this study were senior level management employees working in

various well known Indian organizations (Table 1). They were approached directly during their Management Development Program (MDP) at Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad (India). The participants were approached during the lunch time of the program and were briefed about the study. They were briefed that this study aims to explore the shared understanding of spirituality at workplace as perceived by Indian employees. Further they were also informed that their views will be recorded for transcription purpose only. Participants were free to withdraw from the process at any point of time. Appointments of those participants were taken who agreed to the terms and conditions of the interview process. That participant should be a full time working professional was the only inclusion criterion for participation in the study. The participants were full time employees heading senior positions like Vice President HR (V.P.HR), Deputy General Manager, Senior Managers etc. The mean age of the participants was 43.6 years (with a range of 57-32 years), including 05 females and 25 males. The data for the study was collected in the month of August 2015.

Semi- structured Interviews

A semi structured interview approach was applied for data collection. An interview schedule was generated to secure responses of the employees. Qualitative interviews inherit the property of inclusion of flexible response (King, 2004), which helps in generating a rich understanding about the subject of inquiry. Although the partici-

Table 1. Demographic details of the participants

I.No	Age	Gender	Education	Designation	Total Work Exp	No of Employees	Company Name
1	39	M	PG	Manager	17	1	BPCL
2	35	M	PG	Manager	9	2	Ignify
3	42	M	PG	Chief HR	18	1	Tata power
4	47	F	PG	Director	25	2	Terragini Consulting
5	45	M	G	AVP	25	1	Reliance
6	46	M	PG	Head HR	25	1	Arvind Mills
7	34	M	PG	Manager	10.5	1	BPCL
8	50	F	G	CHRO	28	2	Hi Tech Gears
9	50	M	PG	Head HR	24	2	Arvind Infra
10	33	M	PG	AGM HR	7	2	Nishikawa Ltd
11	33	M	PG	AM HR	12	2	Thumbay Group
12	50	M	PG	DGM HR	25	2	K.F. Group
13	48	M	PG	GM HR	26	2	Minda Group
14	46	M	PG	Head HR	26	2	Nihilent Technology
15	40	M	PhD	Plant Head	17	2	E.Con Packaging Ltd
16	51	M	G	DGM HR	27	1	IOCL
17	49	M	G	Manager	18	2	Jawandson Pvt Ltd
18	47	F	PG	Head HR	19	2	Raheja Group
19	52	M	PG	DGM HR	32	1	UCO Bank
20	45	M	G	GM	24	1	Reliance
21	46	M	PG	MD	22	1	Paiee Infotech
22	43	F	PG	Head HR	25	1	Wave Group
23	50	M	PG	Chief HR	25	1	Minda Group
24	40	F	PG	VP HR	16	1	Indecomm Ltd
25	32	M	PG	Manager	10	1	Reliance
26	37	M	PG	Director	16	2	Remtec Pvt Ltd
27	35	M	PG	Head HR	14	2	Tapta Financial Ltd
28	39	M	PG	Manager	17	1	BPCL
29	57	M	PG	Head	25	1	Reliance
				Maintenance			
30	48	M	PG	VP HR	22	1	Sterling

Note: 1 Work Experience: in Years 2. No of employees: 1= More than 1000, 2 = Less than 1000,
3. Education: G = Graduation, PG = Post Graduation, PhD = Doctoral Degree

participants had full autonomy in expressing their views about the subject of inquiry but to ensure a certain level of continuity and homogeneity in response, critical incident techniques (CIT) were utilized. CIT for these interviews were in accordance with the scholars who have utilized CIT to identify the pro-

cess of thoughts, emotions, behaviors etc. (Chell, 2004).

Interview questions were largely divided into two main sections:

Section 1: "Meaning of spirituality", general, exploratory, non-intrusive ques-

tions like “In your words, what does spirituality means to you?” or “When you hear the word spirituality what all comes to your mind?” (While answering this question, participants were asked about their perception about spirituality in Indian context, they were also informed not to think about right or wrong answers, instead are requested to share their own understanding about the word spirituality. The purpose of this section was to generate the shared understanding of the word spirituality in Indian work setting as perceived by Indian employees.

Section 2: “Attributes of a spiritual individual”, included questions like, what all things a spiritual person brings or characteristics and impact of spiritual individual at the workplace. The aim of this section was two fold; first, to identify the various attributes and characteristics of spiritual person or spirituality. Second, it aimed to explore the impact of spirituality or spiritual orientation at workplace. The interest of the interviewer was to find out the relationship of spirituality with the productivity and performance of the individual and organization.

Procedure

Face to face interviews were conducted as it was most suited method to obtain rich qualitative data from the interviewees (Cochia & Millward, 2011). The first author himself carried out all the interviews, they lasted from 20 minutes to 75 minutes. All the interviews were recorded to allow for verbatim transcription; simultaneously notes were also prepared to generate rich

qualitative information during the interview.

Data Analysis

The qualitative interviews were organized, interpreted and coded using thematic analysis as prescribed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Initially codes were created and applied to the data, then based on similarities themes were identified and assimilated (Leininger, 1985). Data analysis steps were in accordance with the steps suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). In the first phase interview transcripts were read multiple times, to identify the meanings and pattern emerging from each interview. Two types of codes emerged from the reading of the transcripts: low frequency codes and high frequency codes. Low frequency codes were codes whose occurrence was not so often in the transcript unlike the high frequency codes.

Nevertheless low frequency codes were also retained for careful consideration along with the high frequency codes for preparation of final thematic scheme. To maintain the internal homogeneity (consistency with the single theme) and external heterogeneity (distinction between themes) constant revision and review was done (Patton, 1990). To ensure coherence and triangulation of the codes 10-15 percent of the transcript was given to a fellow doctoral colleague of Organizational Behavior area. The codes identified by the fellow researcher were more or less similar to the original codes. Few modifications related to codes which evolved through the discussion with the

fellow researcher were incorporated. This was done to ensure accuracy in the coding process.

Apart from exploring the shared understanding of the word spirituality, interviews also intended to identify the various attributes of a spiritual being. Simple tally approach was utilized, i.e. number of times any attribute was mentioned was counted and noted. Researchers generally dislike the approach of quantifying qualitative data, but it serves a good medium in eroding the differences between quantitative and qualitative research (Silverman, 1984). Tally approach was further utilized whenever quantification of data was felt meaningful.

Findings

The majority of the participants expressed similar responses during the interview process. We will discuss the findings from the interview section wise.

Section 1

The objective of this section is to explore the “meaning of spirituality”, or the shared understanding of the word spirituality as perceived by the Indian managers. The shared meaning of spirituality obtained after the thematic analysis of 30 transcripts was: Spirituality is a

Spirituality is a mechanism of finding peace with inner self simultaneously creating a harmony between inner self and outer environment.

mechanism of finding peace with inner self simultaneously creating a harmony between inner self and outer environment. The finding was in accordance with Elliot andTurnbull (2004), who proposed spirituality as a deeper level of human experience which may shape ones’ behavior from inside out (Heaton, Schmidt-Wilk& Travis, 2004).It is a positive force which makes you believe in the existence of the sacred power. The force makes one more responsible and develops a clear understanding of right and wrong things. It builds a sense of humanitarianism in an individual. Spirituality nurtures a sense of honesty, humbleness, connectedness and selfless concern for others. It makes you more thoughtful, peace-making and enlightened.The findings are in line with (Mahoney & Graci, 1999; Delgado, 2005). To elaborate regarding the shared understanding of spirituality, excerpts from few interviews are presented here.To enhance the understanding further, keywords related to spirituality from each interviewee are presented in Table 2.

Researcher: What does spirituality means to you?

Interviewee 2: “Spirituality is finding peace with the inner self and trying to find harmony between inner self and outer environment”

Interviewee 5: “It is a belief system basically. Belief system is anything, whether I believe in certain God or I can believe human beings as God. It is a certain belief system which energizes you to do certain things which is always good

for the entire community. Whatever is committed with good intentional energy always comes through this belief system”.

Interviewee 8: “For me spirituality is something related to God. The moment I say spiritual it means I have belief in the ideologies of God”

Interviewee 17: “Spirituality to me means complete enlightenment, not believing in physical things.”

Interviewee 18: “Spirituality is connection at the soul level, there is one almighty with whom everyone is connected, so don’t differentiate among human being. It is about finding truth and purpose in life”

The findings revealed that 40 per cent of the participants believe that belief in almighty is an integral component of spirituality. Whereas 30 per cent of the respondents identify ethical behavior as a key component of spirituality Inner peace, Connectedness, Positiveness have been acknowledged as key

components of spirituality by 20 per cent participants. Belief in self and mindful about purpose in life have been identified as key components of spirituality by 16.6 per cent of the participants. Selflessness and ability to introspect have been acknowledged by 10 per cent respectively.

The three components of spirituality: a) belief in almighty, b) connectedness, c) mindfulness are in accordance with the findings of Petchsawang & Duchon (2009). Selflessness and Positiveness have been identified by Freke (2000). Ability to introspect which has been identified as a key component of spirituality in this study can be considered similar to self-awareness (Sigh & Premarajan, 2007). Inner peace can be considered similar to peace which was identified in the study of Singh and Premarajan (2007). Belief in self and ethical behavior was newly identified components of spirituality in this study. However, Saroglou et al (2005) have proposed helping behavior as a component of spirituality, which may be considered as ethical behavior.

Table 2 Number of Employees Reporting the Different Components of Spirituality

Components of Spirituality	Frequency	Percentage
Inner Peace, Calm, stress free	III,II	
20		
Ethical behavior	III,III,I	30
Connectedness with outer world	III, II	20
Belief in supreme power	III, III, III	40
Belief in self	III,I	16.6
Positiveness	III,II	20
Introspection	III	10
Purposeful, Mindful	III,I	16.6
Selflessness	III	10

Section 2

The major aim of this section was to identify the attributes and characteristics of spirituality. Exploring the impact of spirituality at workplace was the other objective of this section. Participants were asked questions like: "According to you what are a few attributes of a spiritual individual". What all things a spiritual person brings or the characteristics and impact of spiritual individual at the workplace?

Analysis of the transcripts of thirty interviews revealed the attributes of a spiritual person which includes: a) Truthfulness, b) Responsibility for ones actions, c) Sense of fairness, d) Courage of conviction, e) Purposeful, f) selflessness, g) Connectedness or togetherness, h) Self-awareness, i) Service orientation or helping behaviour, j) Meditation or devotion, k) Belief in almighty, l) Piousness or purity, m) Peace-making or calm, n) Belief in self, o) Trustworthy or integrity, p) Respect for mankind, q) Convincing, r) High acceptance, s) Happiness.

High acceptance and devotion are the two new attributes found by this study.

Fry (2003) has proposed following attributes or traits of a spiritual person: a) Forgiveness, b) Kindness, c) Standard of excellence, d) Integrity, e) Empathy, f) Honesty, g) Patience, g) Courage, h) Trust, i) Perseverance, j) Vision. Knowing oneself and respect for others were added by Kurth (2003). High acceptance

and devotion are the two new attributes found by this study. Table 3 shows a tally list of attributes identified by this study. Given below are few excerpts to have a deep understanding about the attributes or traits of a spiritual person as mentioned by Indian employees.

Researcher: "What would be the characteristics of a spiritual person?"

Interviewee 1: "The people who are spiritual in nature have a very strong sense of fairness in whatever they do and they also probably have a sense of responsibility towards their duty. They are driven by their set of courage of conviction primarily".

Interviewee 2: "Spiritual person is able to relate his spirit with the larger society for the goodness of the society. I will not relate it with religion; I would say spiritual person continuously introspects about his purpose in life. A person can be spiritual even if he is an atheist".

Interviewee 4: "Anything which makes you more responsible in terms of your action is also dimension of spiritualism."

Interviewer 5: "Person who is having cool, calm with a good intention, always involved in helping others. Making others fulfill their dreams, help what they want to achieve. It is more a kind of giving them without any bad intention. They have a nature of giving, believe in giving".

Interviewee 6: "A spiritual person's attribute could be ability to say overcome

stress being polite, he follows a lifestyle which is less materialistic”.

Interviewee 9: “He is someone who believes in a sacred power. He is clear in his thought process, purpose and time. Because he is very clear, he is actually more committed, he knows what to do and he follows the right path”.

Interviewee 10: “...the first thing which comes to my mind is honesty and humbleness. The person is concerned about the other human being and he is caring. He is right from his heart...follows the right path, there is a rare chance that he will do something unethical.”

Table 3 Number of Employees Reporting Attributes of a Spiritual Person

Attributes of a spiritual person	Frequency	Percentage
Responsibility towards ones action	III,I	16.6
Fairness	III	13.3
Truthful	III	13.3
Courage of conviction	II	06.6
Purposeful, Vision	III	16.6
Selflessness	III	13.3
Connectedness or togetherness	III,III	23.3
Self-awareness	III,I	16.6
Service orientation	III,III,III,II	46.6
Pious, pure heart	III,I	16.6
Belief in God	III,III	23.3
Peace, Calm, Stress free	III,III,III,III,I	46.6
Meditation, Devotion	III	10
Not materialistic	II	06.6
Ethical behavior	III,III,II	33.3
Belief in self	III	13.3
Trust, Integrity	III	13.3
Happy, Joy, Bliss	III,I	16.6
Convincing Power	II	06.6
Respect towards mankind	II	06.6
Acceptance	II	06.6

Discussion & Conclusion

Spirituality is a new field of enquiry in the management discipline (Benefiel, 2003). It has been associated with positive work-related behavior. It has been proposed as a multidimensional construct including: a) compassion, b) connectedness, c) meaning and purpose in life, d) mindfulness, e) belief in transcendence, f) helping behavior (Mahoney &Graci,

1999; Delgado, 2005).Despite, having a plethora of research in West, East, especially in India there is scarcity of literature which explores the meaning of spirituality at workplace.

In this study we tied to identify the shared meaning of spirituality at workplace among Indian employees. Belief in almighty, ethical behavior, inner peace, connectedness, positiveness, belief in self,

selflessness, ability to introspect and mindful about purpose in life have been identified as key components of spirituality. Thus, the interview transcript analysis revealed that spirituality is a mechanism of finding peace with inner self at the same time creating a harmony between inner self and outer environment. It is a sense of having clear vision about the purpose in life. The findings were more or less similar to the meaning of spirituality shared by Western employees. However, it is interesting to find a few more attributes of a spiritual person which were not identified in western literature. Belief in self and ethical behavior were the newly identified components of a spiritual person in this study. Findings of the present study become more relevant given the dearth of literature on spirituality particularly in the Indian context.

The present research has implications for researchers and managers. As spirituality comprises positive traits it is expected that spiritual employees will display more connectedness with coworkers and will help in nurturing the work culture of the organizations. In that scenario it will be interesting to find out whether spirituality can be nurtured at workplace or not. Further, it would be salient to explore the meaning of spirituality in other countries which are contrary to West. Also, it will be worth exploring the linkage between spirituality and other pro-social behaviors of employees such as organizational citizenship behavior, volunteering, social responsibilities etc.

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