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The Impact of Spiritual Intelligence in Reducing Job Stress: Case studies in Malaysia University of East Coast of Malaysia

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Abstract

A qualitative study was conducted with universities lecturers based on their understanding in order to address these questions: How does spirituality activities impact employee's work attitude? And 2) How spirituality activities can over calm stress problem? The study tried to ascertain whether spiritual intelligence can give an impact to lecturers and release their stressful time, how is it functions and until what extend it may. Spiritual intelligence is important in shaping human behaviour. Three lecturers ranging 30-37 in ages and between 5-9 years in teaching experience, were interviewed using open-ended, face to face interviews. The data was analyzed using qualitative methodology and reported. The results showed that each lecturer experienced a deep meaningful feeling when practice their own way of spirituality that can overcome their stressful feeling at work.

Keywords: *spiritual intelligence, attitude, job stress*

1. Introduction

Occupational stress can be wearisome to most employees. It is a major health hazard and a serious challenge to the effective operation of any organization. Stress at work place has become an integral part of everyday life it is called by the World Health Organization as 'worldwide epidemic.' Stress has the tendency to lessen the production of an organization. It is the roles of an organization to reduce any source of stress created in a workplace. On the other hand, spirituality is an attempt used in organizational cultural to cultivate a positive surroundings. Spirituality when recognized and integrated in leadership practice could contribute to personnel well-being and the well-being of their organizations.

In the past few years there has been a growing interest in workplace spirituality, to a certain extent some are calling it as spiritual awakening in the American workplace (Garcia-Zamor, 2003). Since the late 1990s publications such as Wall Street Journal, Business Week, Fortune and others have reported a growing number among employees yearning for the meaning and purpose at work, for a spiritual dimension to organizational life (Duchon & Plowman, 2005). Religion has

its own way in guiding a better life for its followers. Religious and spiritual dimensions can be some of the most important factors in shaping human experience, meaning and behavior (Kripner & Welch, 1992).

2. The Differences between Spirituality and Religiosity

Most of the researchers thoroughly separated the definition of spirituality and religiosity as both has their own meaning. Dhiman (2000) delineates the differences between spirituality and religion. Religion is outward focused on rites and rituals, while spirituality is focused inward and is non-dogmatic, non-exclusive, gender-neutral and non-patriarchal. He describes spirituality as “the awareness of the Divine Ground/Principle of our Being, as characterized by our effort to live in harmony with Devine Principle.”

The dominant view among writers and scholar in workplace spirituality is that religion and spirituality are distinct and diverse. However some attempt to distinguish between spirituality and religion to be analytically and empirically unsustainable (Bell & Taylor, 2001).

From faith perspective, spiritual can be divided into four sets of connections; with self, with others, with nature or environment and with ultimate power (Howard, 2002). Spiritual comes from the spirit which means it is a breath of life. Spirit is the unseen force that breathes life into us, enlivens us, and gives us energy. Spirit helps to define the true, real unique self that is us and confirms our individuality (Moxley, 2000). Religion comes from the Latin “religio” translated as reliance and connection (Scott-peck,1993).

3. Spirituality in Islam

As for Islam, spiritual and religious are in the equivalent meaning. Islam means submission to the Will of God and obedience to His law (Hammudah Abdalati, 1989). In Islamic context, the word of religiosity and spirituality does not exist, they are used interchangeably. Following the Holy Quran and Hadith (Defines as sayings, deeds of agreement of the Holy Prophet), there is no distinction between religion and spirituality. The concept of religion is embedded in the umbrella of spirituality. In the Islamic context, there is no spirituality without religious thoughts and practices and the religion provides the spiritual path of salvation and a way of life (Nasr S.H, 1987). Islamic spirituality means achieving a state of complete harmony with God’s wishes (Sayed Sikandar, 2005).

Islam is a code of life, a living force manifest in every aspect of human life, Muslims also maintain that the individual is the center of gravity and is the launching instrument which can put Islam or any other system for that matter, into full action on full scale. (Hammudah Abdalati, 1980) Islam is one living in peace with God by acknowledging Him as his Lord by fulfilling his duties towards Him. (Sayed Sikandar; 2005)

In Islam, man and his life is viewed as a whole as an entity in whom body and spirit are united (Nasr S.H, 1987). There are no separations between his thoughts and action as there is no distinction between religion and spirituality. Therefore in Islam, there is no spirituality without religious thoughts and practice.

Islam organizes the spiritual or moral life of man in such a way to provide him with all the spiritual nourishment needed for piety and righteousness for safety and peace. The main items in this Islamic prescription are (Hammudah Abdalati, 1980) :

1. Prayers (Solat)
2. Alms Giving (Zakat)
3. Fasting
4. Pilgrimage
5. Love for God and His Messenger, love for truth and humanity for the sake of God
6. Hope and trust in God at all the times
7. Sacrifice for the sake of God by virtue of actual unselfishness

Worshiping Allah The Almighty can be executed in various ways either compulsory or optional. The practices that given by Hammudah Abdalati (1980) are consider as the basic Muslim practice. This acts of worship tremendously in creating a healthy Muslim individual and community of Muslims. It primarily designed to spiritually nourish, maintain and elevate Muslims and render them fitting enough to constitute a competent ‘Ummah and to serve as effective vicegerents of God on earth (Sayed Sikandar, 2005).

4. Spirituality in Workplace

Allah SWT says in the Holy Quran:

“I have only created the Jinn and Man that they may serve me.” (Az-Zariyat : 56)

This verse tells Muslims to carry out their life according to what Allah says. Islam is a way to live in therefore in whatever Muslims do, they must act upon the obedience of Allah. Hence, Islam can be practice in a workplace.

Dhiman (2000) said spirituality may be described as the awareness of divine principles of our being as characterized by our effort to live in harmony with divine principle. Spirituality in workplace is an attempt to get connected to this divine principle in the context of workplace. Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003) define workplace spirituality as a framework of organizational values evidenced in a culture that promotes employees experience of transcendence and joy. Ashmos and Duchon (2000) defined spirituality at work as the recognition that employees have an inner life that nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work that takes place in the context of community.

Spirituality is already an experienced part of workplace, whether we acknowledge it or not. As human groups, organizations have always had a spiritual dimension. This spiritual dimension has at best been a well-kept secret. At worst, it has been denied and suppressed. Generally, it has just been ignored. (Skelley, 1996).

Spirituality in workplace can be nurtured by the power of management. Miliman, Ferguson, Trickett and Condemi (1999) suggested in his model that Human Resource Management has their own role to reinforce the values of spiritual management. He presented a larger “spiritual values-based model” (Figure 2) that can be employed to design an organization that intentionally fosters spirituality. The four-tiered model, developed as an integration/enhancement of Anderson’s

(1997) values-based management model and Schuler and Jackson's (1987) strategic HRM framework, is as follows:

1. Articulation of organizational spiritual values
2. Delineation of business and employee plans and goals
3. Employment of HRM practices to reinforce plan/values
4. Measurement of outcomes in terms of organizational performance and individual employee attitudes and spirituality.

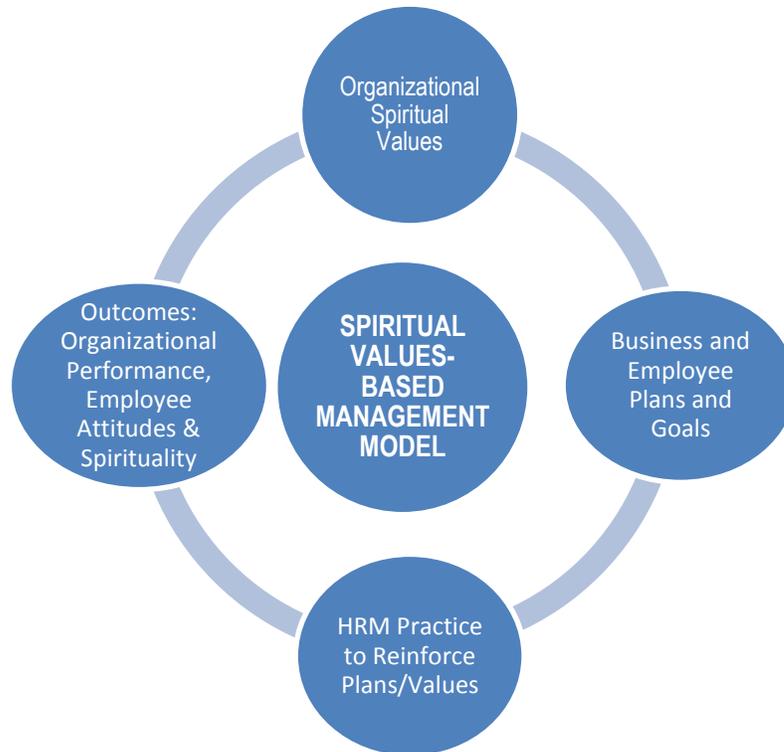


Figure 2 : Milliman's Model (1999)

5. The Needs of Spirituality in Workplace: Job Stress

The growing of research in spirituality in workplace has shown the needs of it nowadays, job stress is the most common reason. According to Cash and Gray (2000), the catalyst for the widespread interest in workplace spirituality is an unstable work environment characterized by downsizing, reengineering and new technologies. Demoralized employees are seeking spiritual solutions to consequent tensions and stress (Mitroff & Denton, 1990). Faced with problems of fear, social alienation and constant turbulent changes, employees are embarking on an individual search for deeper meaning in life. For others, workplace spirituality represents an attempt to experience spirituality not only in their personal lives but also at work where they spend a large amount of time (Krishna Kumar & Neck, 2002).

Job related stress affects us all at the same point, but for some workers it become overpowering. The sources of job stress include the physical characteristics of work such as heat, noise and cold. Other stressors include time pressures, job changes, such as layoffs, demotions or promotions, excessive responsibility, ambiguity of role demands and even chronic boredom (Hudson & Sullivan, 1990). Table 1 presents some of major sources of stress reported by office workers (Hudson & Sullivan, 1990).

Table 1: Sources of Office Stress

Source	Rate (%)
Lack of Promotions or Raises	51.7
Low Pay	49.0
Monotonous, repetitive work	40.0
No input in decision making	35.1
Heavy workload or overtime	31.5
Supervision problems	30.6
Unclear job descriptions	30.2
Unsupportive boss	28.1
Inability or reluctance to express frustration or anger	22.8
Production quotas	22.4
Difficulty juggling home and family responsibilities	12.8
Inadequate breaks	12.6
Sexual harassment	5.6

Many forces have contributed to the revival of spirituality at the workplace. These include social and economic changes and shifts in demographics of the workforce.

- Instability as a result from layoffs, downsizing, merger, and globalization
- Increased stress in remaining workers, who are required to do more for less
- Declining job satisfaction and increasing incidents of depression and burnout

- Environmental pollutions and energy crisis
- Scandals of unethical corporate behavior and the "Enron effect"
- Technology-driven information economy and its dehumanizing effect
- Workplace violence, office rage and threats of terrorism
- Unraveling of traditional institutions, such as schools and the family

In these turbulent times, it is only natural that workers turn to spirituality and religion for remedies, security and inner peace. Since many people have to work longer hours and longer years just to survive financially, there is a greater need for them to incorporate the spiritual aspects of their lives into their work. In order to cope with increasing feelings of stress and alienation, both managers and employees alike are trying to create meaning and purpose in the workplace. They are also searching for a renewed sense of community. The hunger for spirituality and meaning among aging baby boomers may also contribute to this movement. Similarly, the increasing number of women joining the workforce also creates a demand for caring and nourishing at the workplace.

Other reason to have spirituality in workplace is because it helps organization to increase its performance. As Komala and Antharaman (2004) said there is a significant relationship between organizational spirituality and organizational performance. Mitroff and Denton found that those associated with organizations they perceived as "more spiritual" saw their organizations as "more profitable" (Mitroff and Denton, 1999). Organizations that are more spiritually normative in their activities are also more profitable. Organizations that demonstrate moderate to strong Organizational Spiritual Normativity achieve significantly higher long-term rates of net income growth and return on assets (Quantro, 2002).

6. Methodology

The paper is aimed at exploring the role of spirituality in workplace and its contribution towards employee stress. This study is specifically focus on the change of employee stress after practicing spirituality activities or *ibadah* in their work. This is a qualitative research study as it aimed in exploring and explaining the understanding on the role of spiritual in workplace. The qualitative methodology is naturalistic and highly interpretive and involves several traditions of inquiry. It could reveal rare data about the human experience that is essential for understanding and appreciating the human condition (Richardson & King, 1991). The researcher was the primary instrument. Data collected, processed and analyzed by the researcher herself. The advantage of the researcher being the instrument was that the researcher could be responsive to the total context; adapted techniques to the circumstances, expanded on what was known about the situation through sensitivity during observation to nonverbal aspects and could explore anomalous responses (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For the purpose of ethical measures, a consent form was given to the interviewee before conducting the in-depth interview. The outline of interview was determined before the actual process is done. This is to ensure that all relevant topics were covered. The interview was written. Before the interview starts, researcher builds a rapport with participants. The questions were semi-structured and probing used when needed. All field notes and written report were immediately transcribed as soon as interviews were

completed. This study engaged in purposive sampling, in order to know about who is applying the spiritual activities in the workplace. Purposive sampling is synonymous with qualitative research. The participants involved in this study were staffs at University Malaysia Pahang. The interviewee is selected using snowball sampling. Researcher asked participants to provide information needed to locate other members of the population of whom they know that are also practicing spirituality activities at workplace.

7. Findings and Discussions

The purpose of the present study was to explore and understand the contributions of spirituality in workplace towards employer work attitude. The study was carried out through the detailed investigation of the two research questions; 1) How does spirituality activities impact employee's work attitude? And 2) How spirituality activities can over calm stress problem? This study involved two participants who had been selected based on snowballs sampling. Both of them are staff in Centre of Modern Languages and Human Sciences (CMLHS) who have served their organization for more than a year. They involve in most of the spirituality activities at CMLHS. They were also available, readily to discuss the issue, voluntarily to participant in the interview and gave the researcher the right to voice-recorded. Researcher used in-depth interviews with the participants to achieve the purpose of the study. It was a semi-structured interview to justify the findings.

Employee Comprehension of Spirituality in Work Place

As a starting point when asking about the meaning of spirituality in workplace both understand very well the meaning of spirituality in workplace. The findings pointed out the respondent understand the universal of Islam that can be practiced in workplace.

Appropriate Spirituality Activities in Workplace

In Islam there are a lot of worship activities or *ibadat*. The appropriate *ibadat* can be decided or created by the employer or employees. The findings indicated that the participant agree there are some *ibadah* that can be apply easily in a workplace. Spiritual Activities that have been practiced in CMLHS are Islamic Knowledge Sharing or *Tazkirah*, mass prayer, Friday Wisdom (*Tazkirah* for women during Friday's prayer) and reciting *Al-Quran*.

Employee's Practices

Spiritual activities must be practiced by employees too. Islam is a religion of practiced and both participants claimed to involve in the spiritual activities.

Work Attitudes

Religious and spiritual dimensions can be of the most important factors in shaping human experience, meaning and behavior (Bergin, 1985; Fabreza, 1987; Kripner and Welch, 1992). The findings revealed that the participant experiences a deep feeling when practice their own way of spirituality in workplace.

Stress Management

Both participants have their own individual spirituality act to overcome their stress. Their effort in making work life more meaningful is a way to achieve a high performance employee.

8. Conclusions

This article was designed to examine spirituality in workplace can offer valuable understanding how is it important to employee work quality and performance. The findings illustrated that there are five indicators in practicing spirituality in workplace; Employee Comprehension of Spirituality in Work Place, Appropriate Spirituality Activities in Workplace, Employee's Practices, Work Attitudes and Stress Management. Islam is not a religion of vision but it is a religion to be practiced. Islamic knowledge sharing and mass prayer has been practiced in CMLHS as part of their spirituality activities. Milliman et al (2000) suggested that the spirituality has to be measured its outcome in term of organizational performance and individual employee attitudes. This study focused on individual employee attitudes, consequently it is founded that the participants have achieved their satisfaction in practicing Islamic ritual in their workplace, either in mass practices or individually. They claimed to be a better worker especially when dealing with stress. Practicing spirituality at workplace, Islamic practices is proved by these participants that can overcome a number of problems such as stress, peer problem and frustration. This can develop a better and balance organizational performance.

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