Workplace Spirituality Research Summary for Teaching in Organizational Behavior Courses

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Abstract. Workplace spirituality refers to the employee experiences of spirituality in workplace. Considerable empirical evidence has evolved over the last about two decades indicating the relationships of workplace spirituality with organizational behavior (OB) outcomes such as employee work attitudes, behaviors, well-being, and performance. Thus, this paper provides a brief summary of workplace spirituality research. This paper first describes spirituality and workplace spirituality. Thereafter, it indicates that workplace research has utility for managers and supports this by outlining the empirical research evidence on workplace spirituality's association with employee work outcomes and explains why workplace spirituality has such several associations. Subsequently, it describes the actions managers can take to enhance workplace spirituality in their work units. It thereafter points out that managers need to exercise caution in implementing workplace spirituality because of the issues associated with the workplace spirituality phenomenon and with the workplace spirituality research. This is followed by a brief description of a hypothetical organization in which workplace spirituality is high.

Keywords: spirituality in organizations, spirituality for employees, summary for teaching.

1. Introduction

Workplace spirituality refers to the employee experiences of spirituality in workplace. It is one of the recent areas in organizational behavior (OB). Workplace spirituality reflects a manifestation of humanistic orientation in OB (Pawar 2009a). The findings from empirical research for about last two decades have indicated that workplace spirituality has positive associations with employees' several positive reactions, orientations, and behaviors. As a result, students of OB, who are the prospective managers, are likely to benefit from understanding workplace spirituality as it evolves from the research spanning over last about two decades.

Thus, this paper provides a brief summary of workplace spirituality research. Considering that the students in OB courses are this paper's main potential

readers, it provides a simplified view of workplace spirituality while retaining the research literature as the basis of the view presented. It is structured as follows.

First, a brief overview of workplace spirituality is provided. Thereafter, as a step toward providing a more comprehensive description of workplace spirituality, the phenomenon of spirituality is described. Subsequently, a comprehensive view of workplace spirituality is described. Thereafter, the utility of workplace spirituality for a manager is described so that students in OB course, who are prospective managers, understand why they need to understand and implement workplace spirituality in their future workplaces. In order to support the view that workplace spirituality has utility for managers, empirical evidence on the associations of workplace spirituality with several OB aspects are outlined. Subsequently, an explanation is provided for why workplace spirituality has associations with several OB aspects. Thereafter, some of the actions managers can take for enhancing workplace spirituality in their work units are described. This is followed by two sections which point out that managers need to exercise caution in enhancing workplace spirituality in their work units because of the issues associated with the workplace spirituality phenomenon and with the workplace spirituality research.   The subsequent section provides a brief description of a hypothetical organization in which workplace spirituality level is likely to be high. The paper ends by outlining some conclusions.

While a recent chapter titled "Workplace Spirituality for Employee Performance and Well-being" in Pawar's (2019) book provides an overview of workplace spirituality, this paper differs from and goes beyond that chapter in several ways. First, this paper outlines three views of workplace spirituality and reconciles them. Second, it outlines two views of individual spirituality and adopts one of them by providing a justification for it. Third, it includes several components in providing a more comprehensive description of workplace spirituality.   Fourth, the evidence description of workplace spirituality's association with employee performance and well-being is made more up to date. Fifth, the evidence description of workplace spirituality's association with employee work attitudes is made more detailed. Sixth, evidence description on workplace spirituality's association with other work orientations, reactions, and outcomes is newly added. Seventh, a section is added on why workplace spirituality has several positive associations with positive employee outcomes in a workplace. Eighth, the section on what managers actions managers can take to enhance workplace spirituality is made more comprehensive. Ninth, a new section is added on the need for managers to exercise caution in enhancing workplace spirituality in their work units because of the issues associated with the nature of workplace spirituality phenomenon. Tenth, a new section is added on the need for managers to exercise caution in enhancing workplace spirituality in their work units because of the issues associated with the research in workplace spirituality.   Eleventh, a new section is added on a brief description of a hypothetical organization where workplace spirituality is present at a high level.

2. A Brief Overview of Workplace Spirituality

Workplace spirituality is a label which stands for the phenomenon of employee experiences of spirituality within a workplace. Employee experiences of spirituality come from the fulfilment of employees' spiritual needs such as the need for doing meaningful work and for having a sense of community in the workplace (e.g., Ashmos and Duchon 2000). Employee experiences of workplace spirituality can be viewed from multiple perspectives. One perspective is that workplace spirituality comes from an organization's possession of certain features. Another perspective is that workplace spirituality emerges from an employee's expression of his/her individual spirituality in the workplace. Yet another perspective is that workplace spirituality is employees' perception as to extent to which their spirituality is nurtured in an organization. Each of these three perspectives is described below.

The first view suggests that workplace spirituality refers to the presence of certain features in an organization and its functioning which can nourish employee spirit and fulfill employees' spiritual needs. For example, Pfeffer (2003) outlines an organization's features such as adoption of certain positive values in an organization and providing an expression to them through organizational functioning, adoption of practices such as providing autonomy and decision making responsibility to employees, facilitating employee development, self-expression and functioning in self-managed teams, helping employees to fulfil their family and social responsibilities, keeping the workplace free from fear and abuse, and providing collective forms of rewards and recognition. These spirit-nourishing practices are suggested to be useful in fulfilling various needs including the needs for meaning and connectedness or community which are the needs addressed in workplace spirituality.

The second view suggests that workplace spirituality refers to an employee's expression of his/her spirituality in workplace. For example, Tombaugh, Mayfield, and Durand (2011) developed a measure to assess workplace spirituality which assesses the extent to which an employee's attitudes, decisions, actions, and interactions, etc. in the workplace express the employee's spirituality. As another example, Kolodinsky, Giacalone, and Jurkiewicz (2008, p. 466) note, "At the most basic and individual level, workplace spirituality can be viewed as the incorporation of one's own spiritual ideals and values in the work setting." Thus, from this view, workplace spirituality experiences of an employee come from the expression of his/her own individual spirituality in the workplace.

The third view suggests that workplace spirituality refers to the psychological climate perceived by employees which facilitates employee experiences of meaningful work, community, and which nurtures employees' inner or spiritual life (e.g., Ashmos and Duchon 2000, Duchon and Plowman 2005). In this view, workplace spirituality is the employee perceptions of the extent to which an

organization's climate fulfils their spiritual needs for meaning and community and facilitates their spiritual life.

One way to reconcile these three views of workplace spirituality is to consider an employee's expression of individual spirituality in workplace and organization's possession of features such as spiritual values or practices as two ways of enhancing employee experiences of spirituality in workplace and employee perceptions that the organization's psychological climate is that of spirituality. Based on the above, workplace spirituality can be described as employee experiences of spirituality in the workplace influenced by organizational features such as spiritual values and practices and employees' expression of their individual spirituality at workplace. As this description refers to employee experiences of "spirituality", a question naturally arises is: what does the term "spirituality" itself mean? Thus, to provide more clear meaning to workplace spirituality, the meaning of the term "spirituality" needs to be outlined and this is done below.

3. Understanding Spirituality for Comprehensively Describing Workplace Spirituality

While there are multiple views of spirituality in the literature, two distinct views of spirituality, when considered together, can provide a broad understanding of the term spirituality. These two views are outlined below.

Spirituality as Moving Toward the Higher Self

One of the views of spirituality is that spirituality refers to "a search for the sacred, a process through which people seek to discover, hold on to, and when necessary, transform whatever they hold sacred in their lives (Pargament 1997, 1999)" (Hill and Pargament 2003, p. 65). In this view, the "sacred includes concepts of God, the divine, Ultimate Reality, and the transcendent, as well as any aspect of life that takes on extraordinary character by virtue of its association with or representation of such concepts" (Hill and Pargament 2003, p. 65). Based on this view, spirituality can be viewed as a journey toward on the destination of the sacred. This view suggests that spirituality is attained to the extent one approaches or goes closer to the destination of the sacred.

This destination of the sacred is expressed in various ways in the literature. For example, Heaton, Schmidt-Wilk, and Travis (2004, p. 64) describe spiritual development in terms of reaching "*higher states of consciousness*" or "the most basic level of one's self" (italics added). As another example, Fry (2003, p. 705) notes, "Spirituality reflects the presence of a relationship with a *higher power or being* that affects the way in which one operates in the world…" (italics added). Fry (2003, p. 705) also notes, that the spiritual pursuit includes seeking "a personal relationship with a *higher power or being that may or may not be called God*" (italics added). In yet another example, Neff (2006, p. 450) notes,