Spirituality in Work Place and its Effect on Stress & Work life Balance of Employees

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Abstract

This study investigates the moderating effects of spirituality on job stress and work life balance based on a Media Group's employees. A sample of 50 employees of HMVL (a subsidy of HT Media Ltd) of Allahabad unit anonymously filled up a questionnaire comprising quantitative techniques for measurement of Spirituality, job stress and work life balance. The employees were from production, management and editorial department of HMVL Allahabad unit. Survey method was used for the study. Analysis of the data showed that spirituality is negatively correlated with job stress and positively correlated with work life balance. Findings from this study suggest that spirituality could be used as a coping strategy for stress at workplace in the media industry in particular.

Keywords – Spirituality, work life balance and job stress

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to establish the relationship between spirituality, job stress and work life balance of employees. The significance of the study is in the fact that organizations especially the high pressure ones, do not include spirituality in their employee assistance program and this study explains the need of the managers to include spirituality in their employee assistance program to combat stress and promote a healthy work life balance. The study also aims to help employees to realize the need for a spiritual connection and its effectiveness in helping employees deal with stress and reduce their work life imbalance.

Literature Review

According to Alister E McGrath (1999) Spirituality entails improving ones wisdom and will power, achieving a closer relationship with deity, removing illusions or false ideas at the sensory, feeling and thinking aspects. Spirituality is about aligning the human will and mind with the dimensions of life and the universe.

Organizations are witnessing a major transformation in the form of a spiritual movement. From Weber Bureaucratic & Taylor's Scientific Management in the scientific approach to the behavioral approach, now the organizations are moving towards spirituality to keep the workforce happy, motivated and performance oriented. Organizations that were long viewed as rational systems are considering making room for the spiritual dimension, a dimension that has less to do with rules and order and more to do with meaning, purpose and sense of community (USA Today, Business Week, The Wall Street Journal). Encouraging spirituality at the workplace comes from the belief that people have both mind and spirit and the development of the spirit is as important as the development of the mind. To quote Perlman, an advocate of spirituality at work 'ultimately, the combination of head and heart, will be a competitive advantage (Palmer PP, 1994)

Many scholars see a distinction between spirituality and religion. They consider spirituality as personal and inclusive while religion as external and exclusive (Harlos, 2000, Shafranske & Malony, 1990) According to Shafranske & Malony (1990) religion is 'adherence to the beliefs and practices of an organized church or an institution. While Elkins (1990) defined spirituality   as a 'way of being and experiencing that comes about through awareness of a transcendent dimension and is characterized by certain values, in regard to self, others, and whatever one considers to be ultimate'. Religion is a set of values, doctrines and principles that provide an ethical and moral framework for understanding, motivation and behavior (King 2007). It can be concluded that though both are different yet there is a shared sense of values and behavior in the two. Also in the Indian context a water tight division of the two is not possible as religion holds a sublime position in people's life.

Occupational stress has an increasing trend the world among the working class and is now an integral part of working people's everyday life. It has been termed as a 'world- wide epidemic' by WHO. It affects significant number of workers and casts heavy financial loss, human suffering and mental illness. HSE(1) defines work stress as 'the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demands placed on them.' Studies suggest that due to work stress, employees show decreased productivity, absenteeism, higher number of accidents or errors, lower morale and greater interpersonal conflicts with colleagues and superiors (W Cranwell & Alyssa J, 2003)

Stressors are defined as the external events such as difficult relationship or heavy workload that contribute to experience of stress (SL Saunter, LR Murphy & JJ Harrel, 2004) Stress is an individual's internal response to stressors and causes arousal and displeasure. It has been noticed that spiritual practices like meditation, non-attachment and compassion can be used to reduce stress in the workplace but limited research has been done on the effects of spirituality on employees stress management in the work balance.

There is an increasing segmentation between work and leisure. For true understanding of an individual at work, not only that persons work life should be considered, but also his or her life away from work (Snir & Harpaz,2002) A survey of UK & US new educated employees revealed that today's workforce wants meaningful employment, with time to pursue other interests besides work (Doerr, 1998).

There seems to be a paradigm shift in organizational sciences, management theory and practices in the past two decades (Capra 1996; Giacalone and Dafna, 2000). This shift is multi-dimensional and complex like moving from predictable outlook to chaos (Gleick, 1987), from simplicity to complexity (Lewin1992), from transactional leadership to transformational leadership (House & Shamir, 1993), from an economic focus to balance of profits, quality of life, spirituality and social responsibility concerns (walsh, weber & Margolis, 2003) and a change from a materialistic to spiritual orientation (Fox, 1994, Neal, 1997)

In line with his paradigm shift, organizations have been experimenting with new ways and ideas to help employees balance work and family, like flexible work arrangement (Gottlieb, Kelloway, and Barham, 1998) and telecommuting (Kugelmass, 1995) and strategies of empowerment (Byman, 1991).

This new paradigm shift has been called the spirituality movement and it includes employees search for simplicity, meaning, self-expression, and interconnectedness to something higher (Marques, Dhiman, and King, 2007).

Csiernik and Adams examined the impact of stress on spirituality and the effects of spirituality on workplace stress. They found that spirituality contributes to wellness and helps to combat stress at workplace.

According to Waltz, spiritual individual have personality traits like a positive self-esteem, internal locus of control, coping effectively with stress, high levels of tolerance, as well as emotional intelligence. Thus a spiritual person will have greater ability to cope with stress.

Little empirical research has been done on area of spirituality at work and work life balance. Laabs, Sullivan and Mainiero (2008) and Mintroff & Denton (1999) suggested that spirituality in the work place allowed the employees to incorporate their spirituality into the work place and find the balance between carrying their work duties and being true to oneself. Previous research has shown relationship between work life balance and work life conflict and job stress (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, Kinman & Jones, 2008, Wong & Lin, 2007) as well as between spirituality and stress (Ardelt,2003, Lustyk et al, 2006).

Changes in the workforce over the last two decades, has further increased the need for work life balance (Clark, 2001). Diversity of the current workforce is due to more woman and minorities in the work force, increasing family responsibilities of the employees and the aging population. (Abbot & Di Ceiri, 2008; Di Ceiri, Holmes, Abbot & Pettit 2005) Progressive organizations seeking competitive advantage have introduced work life balance programs which help employees better integrate their work-family responsibilities (Abbot & Di Cieri 2008, Parkes & Langford 2008, Stone, 2008).

Aims and Hypothesis

The overall purpose of this study is to investigate empirically spirituality's relationship with job stress and work life balance of employees.

Hypothesis 1: Individual spirituality moderates the effects of job stress at work place.

Hypothesis 2: Spirituality of an individual influences his/her work life balance.

Spirituality will be the moderator variable, job stress an independent variable and work life balance the dependent variable in this study. The construct of the study will be:

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┌─────────────────────────┐         ┌─────────────────────────┐
│  Stress at workplace    │────────▶│  Work Life Balance      │
│  (Independent Variable) │         │  (Dependent Variable)   │
└─────────────────────────┘    ▲    └─────────────────────────┘
                               │
                  ┌────────────────────────┐
                  │     Spirituality       │
                  │  (Moderator Variable)  │
                  └────────────────────────┘
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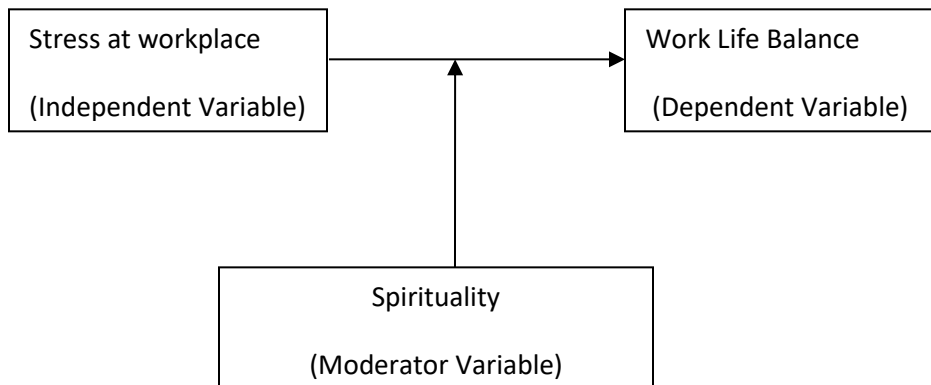
Research Design

This study involves a non-experimental explanatory research design to help explain the linkage between spirituality, stress & work life balance. The purpose of the study is to examine the relationship between stress the HT Media Ltd. Allahabad's workers faced and whether spirituality helped to reduce such stress and influence their work life balance.

A self report questionnaire was used to probe the links between spirituality, stress and work life balance. The questionnaire consisted of a demographic section, the SISRI-24 (The Spiritual Intelligence Self Report Inventory, D King, 2008) a work life balance scale and a job stress in general scale was used (please refer to Appendix). The table below summarizes the variables studied in this study:

Study Variable Names and Classifications	
Variable Name	*Type of Variable*
Spirituality at Work	Moderator Variable
Job Stress	Independent Variable
Work-Life Balance	Dependent Variable

Quantitative rating scales were used for all three measurements. The SISRI-24 scale for spirituality had a likert scale from 0- Not at all true for me till 4- Completely true for me. Stanton et al.'s (2001) fifteen item Stress in General was used to measure the degree to which the job was perceived as taxing, exceeding resources and/or endangering well-being (Stanton et al 2001). Hill et al.'s (2001) five item work family balance scale was used to measure the degree to which an individual was able to balance simultaneously the emotional, behavioral and time demands of both paid work and family or personal duties.

Sample Selection

Convenience sampling was used as the researcher had regular contact and access to the HT Media Ltd. Allahabad workers and so was able to get a convenient and substantial sample for study.

Data Collection

Online and hard copies of the questionnaire were made available to the 77 employees of the company, of which 70 filled responses were returned. Out of these 70, only 50 complete responses could be further processed for analysis.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1 below gives the demographic composition of the sample. Out of the 50 sample size 88% were males and 12% were females

TABLE 1		
Description of the Sample		
GENDER	**TOTAL**	**%AGE**
Male	44	88%
Female	6	12%
EDUCATION	**TOTAL**	**%AGE**
Graduate & below	34	68%
Post Graduate & above	16	32%
AGE	**TOTAL**	**%AGE**
25-35	23	46%
35-45	19	38%
>45	8	16%
MARITAL STATUS	**TOTAL**	**%AGE**
Single	4	8%
Married	46	92%
CURRENT POSITION	**TOTAL**	**%AGE**
Executive	2	4%
Junior Management	12	24%
Middle Management	32	64%
Senior Management	4	8%

For analyses of the 50 responses, the scores of lower Quartile and below and the third Quartile and above were taken for Spirituality with their corresponding stress and work life balance score and their degree of correlation was calculated. The findings were:

	Respondent	Sprituality Score	Stress Score	Work Life Balance Score
Q1 and Below Score	3	27	31.5	11
	15	27	30	11
	49	32	30	19
	50	36	30	12
	7	45	22.5	22
	19	45	24	22
	10	54	22.5	20
	11	57	25.5	18
	12	57	25.5	18
	20	57	25.5	18
	26	57	30	18
	5	58	21	19
	17	58	18	19
	21	58	25.5	19
	22	58	21	13
	24	58	30	19
Q3 and above score	23	68	15	28
	25	68	15	28
	28	68	15	28
	31	68	16.5	28
	32	68	15	28
	33	68	15	25
	42	68	18	22
	39	69	19.5	26
	9	70	19.5	34
	40	72	15	27
	43	72	18	31
	45	72	16.5	22
	44	74	15	26
	34	75	21	24
	46	75	13.5	28
	1	76	16.5	19
	13	76	18	19
	2	82	13.5	27
	14	82	18	27
Variance			542.53	514.50
Pearsons Coefficient of correlation			-0.83	0.72

Table 2 Descriptive Analysis

Conclusion

The findings were in line with the hypothesis and can be summarized in a Table as:

Table 3 Statistical Analysis

STATISTICAL MEASURE	SPIRITUALITY	STRESS	WORK LIFE BALANCE
MEAN	61.57	20.74	22.14
STD DEVIATION	14.53	5.64	5.72
CORRELATION		-0.83	0.72

The high negative correlation between stress & spirituality upholds the hypothesis that with higher spirituality in the worker the effect of job stress is lesser and the positive correlation of spirituality with work life balance proves the second hypothesis that spirituality and work life balance move in the same direction, ie, higher spirituality in the employee gives him a higher balance between his personal life and work life and a lower spirituality results in a low balance of work life.

This upholds Csiernk & Adams (2002) theory that spirituality indeed helps in reducing stress. There are few models and theories that involve spirituality and its relation with work life balance. Briggins (1996), Burack (1999), Laabs (1995) & Marques (2005) have asserted that incorporating spirituality in the workplace involves giving employees flexibility to balance work life issues and this assertion has been upheld by the findings of this study .

Recommendation

In today's competitive world, the workplace is becoming more and more demanding and thus, employees need to deal with highly stressful situations. Globalization has substantially changed the nature and operation of the market place and in such an environment organizations need to generate more money and indirectly demand more work resulting in increase in the stress levels of the employees, leaving employees dissatisfied with their work as they even cannot maintain the work and neither their work life balance.

Organizations should consider implementing stress management & wellness programs that have spirituality component in order to tackle ongoing work stress and help employees develop a healthy work life balance.

Limitations

Spirituality is a subjective concept and so the use of only quantitative method for data collection and analysis could have limited the depth and quality of the research study, Also job stress and work life balance were measured using quantitative methods that could again have limited the result in the study. The group sample size also limited the results of the study. Most participants were males (88%) and this may have influenced the result as this was not a representative sample of the general population. Samples of equal males and females should also be considered to thoroughly test gender differences in work life issues. Self report measures were used which can create bias in the data. Participants may give false information to appear socially desirable (Murphy & Davidshofer, 200)

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