

Workplace Spirituality in a Thai Organization: A Grounded Theory Approach

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Abstract: *The objectives of this qualitative research with a grounded theory approach are to describe the process of workplace spirituality practices, investigate how an organization develops workplace spirituality practices, and study how workplace spirituality practices affect organizational performance. Constructivism (interpretivism) is a research paradigm. In order to gain access the researcher began a pilot study with five participants by in-depth interviews and informal conversational interviews, then selected 28 participants from “Asia Precision Public Company Limited” with at least three years of work experience. The setting involved purposive sampling and theoretical sampling to identify the 28 participants. Interview data, audio visual and document reviews were integrated to answer the research questions. Data were collected from in-depth, semi-structured interviews of the participants. Based on manual coding, six main categories emerged, which are “Workplace spirituality”, “Valued human resources”, “Pleasant work environment”, “Employee-focus”, “Role of the supervisor”, and “Lower turnover rate”. In conclusion, the research reported in this article makes a significant contribution to our knowledge about the importance of workplace spirituality practices of an organization in Thai society and reveals the benefits to society, as well as to the volunteers themselves.*

Keywords: workplace spirituality, spirituality development, human resource management, human resource development

Introduction

For many years, workplaces have become the center of everyday life, and social contact and interpersonal concerns have been reduced with many employees feeling insecure at work and less committed to their employers leading to a decrease in performance (Said, Louarn, & Tremblay, 2007). Employees are increasingly yearning for meaningfulness and fulfillment at work (Gull & Doh, 2004) and are longing for a sense of connection in the workplace as they have experienced in the traditional family, the extended family, and community ties (Gockel, 2004).

To respond effectively to this phenomenon, organizations are increasingly realizing and looking for new ways to foster employee commitment and morale, to help them feel passionate about their work and to create an environment where each person can realize their potential while fulfilling the requirements of their work. Issues regarding workplace spirituality have been raising interest and discussion. The role of spirituality to add more

meaning to one's workplace has been recognized as a fundamental area of research in the academic world (Daniel, 2010; Petchsawang & Duchon, 2009).

As Fry (2003) noted, there is an emerging and accelerating call for workplace spirituality. Many corporations have encouraged the development of this trend because they believe a humanistic work environment can create a win-win situation for employees, coworkers, and the organization (Lips-Wiersma, Dean, & Fornaciari, 2009). People work with not only their hands, but also their spirit. It is when people work with their hearts or spirit that they find meaning and purpose, a kind of fulfillment that means a place where people can express their whole or entire selves and be fulfilled. Enabling the expression of human experience at its deepest, most spiritual level may not only reduce stress, conflict, and absenteeism, but also enhance work performance (Krahnke, Giacalone, & Jurkiewicz, 2003).

Management and senior level administrators need to develop workplace spirituality for building an inspirational working environment for their employees. Also, organizations will have to build workplace spirituality for their people to be happy at work and to understand the individual needs of their staff members. Successful organizations of the future must understand the nature of human needs (Sasin, 2013). As work related illnesses and accidents are increasingly viewed as a global social issue, workplace spirituality is considered to be such a program to resolve them (Yamato, 2010). Workplace spirituality can lead to success in employee engagement, job satisfaction, and the quality of work life.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are: to describe the process of workplace spirituality practices; to investigate how an organization develops workplace spirituality practices; and to study how workplace spirituality practices affect organizational performance.

Research Questions

1. What is the process of workplace spirituality practices in the organization?
2. How does the organization develop workplace spirituality practices?
3. How do workplace spirituality practices affect organizational performance?

Literature Review

The Concept of Workplace Spirituality in an Organization

Workplace spirituality has been the focus of much research during the last decade (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2008; Gross-Schaefer, 2009). This shift from a capital-centered to a human-centered workplace has precipitated an interest to find deeper meaning within one's work. Although the literature indicates that spirituality is a significant dimension within the workplace (Riaz & Normore, 2008). The growing interest in workplace spirituality is evident in corporations, corporate meeting rooms, and the business world as well (Karakas, 2010). Scholars and researchers have taken workplace spirituality as a personal experience into consideration from various viewpoints and perspectives (Young, 2012).

A variety of terms have been used to describe workplace spirituality. Giacalone & Jurkiewicz (2010) proposed a definition of workplace spirituality as an aspect of the workplace, either in the individual, the group, or the organization, that promotes individual

feelings of satisfaction through transcendence. To elaborate, that the process of work facilitates employees' sense of being connected to a non-physical force beyond themselves that provides feelings of completeness and joy. As well as, Dehler & Welsh (2003) described workplace spirituality as a search for meaning, deeper self-knowledge or transcendence to a higher level. Furthermore, Rego & Cunha (2008), defined workplace spirituality as the recognition that employees have an inner life which nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work taking place in the context of a community (p. 55).

Ashmos & Duchon (2000) addressed workplace spirituality both from the experience of individuals and the organization's work environment. They defined a workplace spirituality as one that enables the individual's expression of an inner life by performing meaningful work in the context of a community. Moreover, Kinjerski & Skrypnek (2004) described that workplace spirituality as a description of the experiences of employees who are passionate about and energized by their own work, find meaning and purpose in their work, feel they can express their complete selves at work, and feel connected to those with whom they work.

Karakas (2010) suggested three different perspectives on how workplace spirituality benefits employees and supports organizational performance based on the extant literature as, enhances employee well-being and quality of life, provides employees a sense of purpose and meaning at work, provides employees a sense of interconnectedness and community. Workplace spirituality helps employees to have a more meaningful work, and better relationships with people at work (Mitroff & Denton, 1999). Several scholars contend that workplace spirituality can lead to better functioning employees, in terms of their overall contribution to the work organization, to higher productivity, better decision making, and increased problem solving capabilities and overall more efficient use of material and human resources (Cash, Gray, & Roods, 2000; Krishnakumar & Neck, 2002).

According to Campuzano & Seteroff (2010), they explained that workplace spirituality can promote employee success, lead to self-actualization and employee satisfaction, the values of honesty, trust, respect, responsibility, and integrity. Workplace spirituality can be considered as the new competitive advantage, since increased profits and performance have been representative of organizations. Employees who demonstrate workplace spirituality traits have a greater understanding to adapt to a changing environment, the ability to trust others, and a higher level of commitment (Mohamed, Wisnieski, Askar, & Syed, 2004). This concern arises from the fact that employees with joy and happiness in various forms are staff with better performance and effectiveness who could assist organizations in reaching their goals in the best possible way (Eby, Mahar, & Butts, 2010; Hartel & Page, 2009). Workplace spirituality also impacts overall employee as well as organizational outcomes and practices (Deshpande, 2012). It has been suggested that organizations that encourage workplace spirituality to their employees may experience enhanced organizational performance (Neck, 2002; Thompson, 2000), higher profits and success (Mitroff & Denton, 1999; Turner, 1999).

Research Design

A qualitative research approach was considered the most effective one for this study. This is because qualitative researchers study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The research design of this study was the constructing grounded theory

that consisted of systematic, flexible guidelines for correcting and analyzing qualitative data in order to construct a theory (Charmaz, 2006). This grounded theory process started with gathering data and ended by writing an analysis and reflecting on the entire process. The constructivist research paradigm was appropriate as it allows for the exploration of cultural complexities and perspectives from the perspective of the participants themselves, a process described by Hofstede & Hofstede (2005, p. 4) as “understanding from within”.

Data Collection

Data collection methods in this study were a combination of in-depth interviews, audio visual and document reviews methods. The researcher created an interview guide by combining the theories of Patton (2002) & Charmaz (2006). The participants were selected by using purposive and theoretical sampling. The number of participants depended on data collection until saturation was reached. Theoretical saturation occurs in data collection when, no or little new information is being extracted from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 212). After the pilot study, the researcher selected 28 employees from “Asia Precision Public Company Limited (Asia Precision)”, with at least three years of work experience, as the participants for this study.

Table 1: Demographics of the Participants

No.	Gender	Age	Education	Marital status	Job position	Years of employment
1	Male	35	Vocational Certificate	Married	Driver	9
2	Female	34	Bachelor Degree	Married	Bill Collection	10
3	Female	36	Diploma	Married	Leader	9
4	Female	37	Bachelor Degree	Single	Leader	9
5	Female	35	Diploma	Married	HR Officer	10
6	Female	26	Bachelor Degree	Single	HR Officer	3
7	Male	49	Bachelor Degree	Married	Supervisor	18
8	Female	45	Diploma	Married	Leader	12
9	Female	42	Diploma	Married	Supervisor	17
10	Female	35	Vocational Certificate	Married	Leader	13
11	Male	31	Diploma	Married	Leader	10
12	Female	29	Vocational Certificate	Married	Leader	11
13	Male	33	Diploma	Married	Leader	10
14	Male	38	High School Certificate	Married	Oil Skimmer	5
15	Female	31	Diploma	Married	HR Officer	9
16	Male	33	Diploma	Married	Leader	9
17	Female	34	Vocational Certificate	Single	Leader	10
18	Male	32	Diploma	Married	Leader	5

No.	Gender	Age	Education	Marital status	Job position	Years of employment
19	Female	35	High School Certificate	Married	Leader	12
20	Female	37	Vocational Certificate	Married	Operator	3
21	Male	32	Diploma	Married	Leader	11
22	Female	32	Diploma	Married	QA	4
23	Female	28	Vocational Certificate	Married	Asst. Sub Leader	6
24	Male	32	Diploma	Married	Leader	10
25	Male	36	Diploma	Married	Leader	12
26	Female	34	High School Certificate	Married	Sub Leader	11
27	Male	32	Bachelor Degree	Married	Leader	9
28	Female	40	Vocational Certificate	Married	Store Officer	4

Data Analysis

Saldana (2009) concluded that coding manually is useful for small-scale studies. There were three cycles coding as: **First cycle coding method**. When the data were extracted from the interview transcripts, the coding and formatting made it more convenient and easier to revise. The number for each line was assigned to allow a preliminary analysis of the data. The researcher used a pencil portrait of Initial Coding, devised by Charmaz (2006), and then needed to read and re-read the raw data. **Second cycle coding method**. The researcher began with manual coding line by line. Then, classified and grouped the open codes. In order to clarify the second round coding correctly the researcher consulted a qualitative research expert on this matter. There were 48 categories emerged. **Third cycle coding method**. After the 48 categories emerged, the researcher then displayed and made reductions again. Then, withdrawing and making a conclusion (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Finally, there were only six main categories emerged in this study: (1) Workplace spirituality, (2) Valued human resources, (3) Pleasant work environment, (4) Employee-focus, (5) Role of the supervisor, (6) Lower turnover rate.

Discussion

Response to Research question one: “what is the process of workplace spirituality practices in the organization?” In responding to this research question, there were three themes that emerged. It included: workplace spirituality process; valued human resources; and pleasant work environment.

Workplace spirituality process. The process of developing workplace spirituality practices started when the president and the top executives realized the importance of workplace spirituality and assigning all employees to attend workplace spirituality activities. Thai Health Promotion Foundation suggested that the most important factor in initiating workplace spirituality is the top leader. It starts with the leader’s vision and commitment to sincerely to give priority and care to employees (Limkriengkrai, 2011). Today, the leaders play an effective role in the development of the organizations. Cultures are created by

the leaders. Moreover, persons are also influenced by the leaders (Veisesh, Mohammadi, Pirzadian, & Sharafi, 2014).

Valued human resources. Workplace spirituality practices in an organization concept started from a change in the management's outlook on HRM and HRD. The company has in place a HRM and HRD policy for every level in order to increase their skills and knowledge, and for the company to have efficient manpower for better organizational performance. Thai Health Promotion Foundation suggested that HR division is another important mechanism in moving the organization toward workplace spirituality. Professional HR developers must be dedicated to increase employees' spiritual needs (Limkriengkrai, 2011). It is also confirmed by Rust & Gabriels (2011), who suggested that the HR department can play an important role to create strategies that encompass workplace spirituality in order to create a culture that is geared towards the successful achievement of both business and personal goals.

Pleasant work environment. Working environment of the company was an open form of communication, and flexible. The company has been serious about promoting safety and quality of life for employees, communities or people concerned. Jackson (2013) stated that a positive working environment is very important when it comes to creating a positive overall work environment. Creating a pleasant work environment where people like to be is another crucial factor in successfully implementing workplace spirituality. When people like where they are, they will support the organization (Shojaiel, Barani, & Seyyedrezaie, 2013).

Response to research question two: "how does the organization develop workplace spirituality practices?" In responding to this research question, there were four themes that emerged. It included: workplace spirituality practices; workplace spirituality activities; employee-focus; and role of the supervisor.

Workplace spirituality practices. The company developed workplace spirituality practices with emphasis on development of all employees to be good people, by following in the King's footsteps, inculcating the employees to have discipline, harmony, sacrifice, virtue, and gratitude. The company create a brotherhood and encourage them to work with an attitude towards the plant as more than a workplace. Growing numbers of businesses show that people want their workplace spirituality to be more than just faith and belief, they want it to be practical and applied. They want to bring their whole selves to work with body, mind and spirit (McLaughlin, 2009). The company's motives for incorporating workplace spirituality practices were the needs to develop employees to be good, happy, mindful, concentrate at work, and to be able to control their emotions, patience, morality and ethical behaviors such as honesty and responsibility (Pongsabutr, 2009).

Workplace spirituality activities. The company has a variety of workplace spirituality activities to develop its employees and organization. This was confirmed by the study of the Department of Mental Health Thailand (2013) which recommended nine activities to enhance workplace spirituality, including harmonizing activities, communication development, competency development, morale encouragement, sports and exercise, recreational activities, health promotion, public charity and voluntary activities, and activities for the employees' family members. Examples of workplace spirituality activities included: meditation time, spiritual training, appropriate accommodation of employee prayer practices, and openly asking questions to test if company actions are aligned with a higher meaning and purpose (Yogesh & Srishti, 2010), and employee volunteer programs which offer a chance for people in an organization to do good things for society (Prayukvong, 2007).

Employee-focus. The participants reported that the company focuses on employees, by listening to the comments, develop their skills and knowledge, provide a pleasant work environment, fair pay and providence fund as well as other facilities are a standard practice for HRM and HRD to sustain the high performance of its employees. As Houn & Lin (2014) described that when an organization gives more support to its employees; the employees will create higher involvement in their work. Creating a plan for the continuous improvement and advancement of employees is a vital part of a company's long-term success (Keiningham & Aksoy, 2014; Wonderlic, 2014).

Role of the supervisor. A supervisor has a very close relationship with their subordinates. The employees can ask for help, personal counseling, open communication, and suggestions or comments. Management Study Guide (2014) said that supervisor plays multiple roles at one time including a planner, guide, mediator, inspector, and counselor. This can be done by handling the grievances and satisfying the employees. Reave (2005) stated that workplace spirituality is a powerful source of motivation for followers. In any organization, supervisors who consistently find ways to recognize the achievement of their employees through positive emotional experiences deliver superior results (Blount, 2014).

Response to research question three: "how does workplace spirituality affect organizational performance?" In responding to this research question, there were three themes that emerged. It included: workplace spirituality effect; workplace spirituality benefits; and lower turnover rate.

Workplace spirituality effect. The employees had better changes in their mental and emotional stability, moral strength, ethical values, and better relationships with their co-workers. Employees had more right beliefs, reduced job stress, better job satisfaction, positive thinking, trust building, and also had organization commitment. Workplace spirituality generally has a positive impact on job satisfaction (Altaf & Awan, 2011; Bodia & Ali, 2012) and employee commitment (Hong, 2012). In addition, workplace spirituality enhances employees' morale, and productivity due to the reduction in stress and burnout (Chand & Koul, 2012; Kumar & Pragadeeswaran, 2011). In addition, workplace spirituality has been linked to better moral behavior, virtuous living, honesty and ethical business practices (Geigle, 2012; Umphress & Bingham, 2011).

Workplace spirituality benefits. The employees had higher productivity, increased output, reduced time and wastages, lower absenteeism, more focus in their work, increased creativity, more honesty and trust, which will ultimately lead to increased organizational performance and financial success. Employees with workplace spirituality found the work more satisfying, meaningful and perform better (Ajala, 2013). Workplace spirituality also contributes to increased organization performance and productivity (Beheshtifar & Zare, 2013; Jason & Sudha, 2014; Javanmard, 2012) which has many positive advantages for organizations (Rastgar, Zarei, Davoudi, & Fartash, 2012).

Lower turnover rate. It was found that developing and encouraging workplace spirituality promises to provide several positive outcomes related to organizational performance including a lower turnover rate. Organizations with workplace spirituality come to find that the benefits they sow ultimately lead to greater team cohesion and less turnover (Garavaglia, 2008). The global management consulting firm McKinsey & Company determined that when companies engage in programs that use workplace spirituality techniques, productivity improves and turnover is substantially reduced (Myers, 2012).

Implications

Implications for practice #1: For the individual level. The results provided a clearer understanding of workplace spirituality practices perceived by employees of the organization. Workplace spirituality practices can produce positive outcomes to develop employees to have better attitudes, emotional stability, moral strength, ethical values and caring. As well, the employees had more correct beliefs, peacefulness, reduced job stress, increased job satisfaction, more happiness, positive thinking, building trust occurred, more creativity and innovation, and enhanced productivity. They also had better health, physical well-being, and quality of life.

Implications for practice #2: For the organizational level. The results show that after participating in workplace spirituality activities, the employees had better work connections and relationships with staff members and their associates, higher productivity, increased output, reduced time and wastages, lower absenteeism, lower turnover rate, more creativity, better employee fulfillment, higher commitment, increased organizational performance and increased financial success.

Implications for practice #3: For the community level. Today's workplace spirituality is deliberate in implementing a vision that is built around contributions to the betterment of mankind. It promotes work outside of the organization that contributes to and gives back to society and country through community and volunteer activities. The company incorporates the concept of workplace spirituality with full potential to create good people with moral and ethics values. This is done by employing the Thai King's footstep to give guidance and to develop tools in planting a good seed in the people with good discipline, unity, altruism, morality and gratitude. Workplace spirituality makes HR professionals and businesses consider themselves to be socially responsible for employees, customers, and the community.

Recommendations for Further Research

First. There is a lack of workplace spirituality research at the community level; the opportunity is opened up for more research in this area in order to develop the sustainability community, nation, and country. **Second.** This research study provides organizations with a set of organizational workplaces which may ensue and promote a working environment. It is important for organizations to focus on these factors for improving employee and organizational productivity and profitability. Future research may also be needed to explore more significant factors responsible for ensuring the workplace spirituality environment.

Third. Most of this research study is in a western context. Additional eastern context studies in various countries and in various organization types and sizes are needed to develop a broader understanding of workplace spirituality in an eastern context.

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