

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SPIRITUALITY AND WORKPLACE EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE: IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIVIDUALS IN ORGANIZATIONS**Prof. (Dr.) Surendra Kumar***School of Management, Babu Banarasi Das University, Faizabad Road, Lucknow.***Ms.Arushi Bhasin***Dept.of.Management, Babu Banarasi Das National Institute of Technology & Management, Lucknow.***ABSTRACT**

A discussion of spirituality within the workplace is a taboo topic (Milliman, Czaplewski, & Ferguson, 2003). However, the integration of emotional intelligence based principles and activities within organizations provide employees with additional skills to better understand and integrate their personal spiritual experience into their work. Spirituality provides organizations and employees with an entirely different way of knowing and experiencing work (Flier, 1995). A way of experiencing work that does result in measurable market advantage (Aburdene, 2005). The present article explores and proposes a hierarchical relationship between workplace emotional intelligence and employee spirituality. An explanation of how spirituality and an employee's spiritual practice can enhance the demonstration of emotional intelligence at work is provided. Future directions in workplace spirituality research are suggested, with particular attention provided to the organisational issue of employee attraction, engagement and retention.

Précis: *This article explores and proposes a hierarchical relationship between workplace emotional intelligence and employee spirituality. An explanation of how spirituality and an employee's spiritual practice can enhance the demonstration of emotional intelligence at work is provided.*

Key words: *Emotional Intelligence, Spirituality, Spiritual Intelligence, Employees, Organization.*

INTRODUCTION

Spirituality is often defined as an awareness of a Being or Force that transcends the material aspects of life (Myers, Sweeney, & Witmer, 2000). As such, a spiritual 'life' engenders self-development related to spirituality; encompassing aspects of self-awareness, existentialism, religiosity and life purpose, morality and ethics, peace with oneself, and self-actualization (1998; D Vella-Brodrick, 1995; Dianne Vella-Brodrick & Allen, 1995). Furthermore, the spiritual 'seeker' is an individual (and employee) who actively considers and pursues a spiritual life. Spirituality has been characterized as a core characteristic of healthy people (Seaward, 1995) and, more recently, high performing employees and organizations (Aburdene, 2005; Chandler & Holden, 1992; Garcia-Zamor, 2003; Zohar & Marshall, 2004).

The purpose of this article is to explore the relationship between the effective application of emotional intelligence at work and another emerging indicator of enhanced organisational performance: workplace spirituality (Aburdene, 2005; Mitroff & Denton, 1999). The article commences with a summary of how the current business trend of developing greater employee emotional awareness and intelligence provides employees with the psychological grounding to explore the more complex aspects of individual and Collective spiritual experience. The article then outlines how an employee's spiritual practice can further enhance their workplace emotional awareness and intelligence, and concludes with possible future directions of spirituality research in the areas of employee attraction, engagement and retention.

The present author provide two caveats for what follows: first, we provide only a brief overview of this vast topic of emotional intelligence and spirituality in the workplace. Like emotional intelligence, spirituality is an increasingly popular topic in both academic and mainstream literature (Dy-Liacco, Kennedy, Parker, & Piedmont, 2005; Moberg, 2002) and it is not possible to explore the breadth and depth of available research in this article. Further, for brevity we will assume the reader has a foundational understanding of the emotional intelligence

construct, its terminology and workplace correlates. Second, we will explore the hierarchical relationship between emotional intelligence and spirituality only within an individual context. Although research into the integral nature of spirituality (Wilbur, 2006) informs researchers that the interpretation of an individual's experience of spirituality must also concurrently co-interpret the individual's cultural, spiritual practices and societal context, the present authors will only focus on how an individual's current level of awareness and self-understanding frame-of-reference (an individual's "View") influences his or her emotional and spiritual development. In focusing only on the inner experience of spirituality and emotional intelligence we will explore how organizations might mitigate employee burnout and further motivate employees towards their human potential at work (Garssen & Visser, 2005).

HOW SPIRITUALITY RELATES TO EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Current research into spirituality indicates the exploration of the latter stages of spiritual understanding evolve subsequent to an individual developing a greater capacity in other lines of development underpinning human potential (Reich, 2000; Wilbur, 2006). Although not an exhaustive list, spiritual attentiveness and understanding both interrelates and builds upon other developmental lines of the 'Self' (or 'Selves') such as: *Cognitions* (and *Meta-Cognitions*), what do I think about what I am aware of?; *Needs*, what do I require?; *Morals*, what should I do?; *Self-Identity*, who am I?; *Values*, what is significant to me?; *Kinaesthetic*, how do I physically do that?; *Aesthetics*, what appeals to me?; *Emotions/Affects*, what are the range of emotions I experience?; *Intrapersonal*, how resilient and confident am I?; and *Interpersonal*, how do I socially relate to others? Within the context of employee motivation and performance, the factors contributing to an employee attaining his or her full potential within work and career and with work colleagues are many.

Considering only on the personal – or 'within' – elements of human functioning, logic suggests an individual fully developed in each of these lines of 'Self' would demonstrate each capacity equally well. Using the manifestation of workplace emotional intelligence as an example, the very definition of 'Emotional Intelligence' is often defined as thinking with emotion and effectively communicating the outcome of that thinking (Cherniss & Goleman, 2001; Gantt & Agazarian, 2004; Palmer & Stough, 2003; Schutte et al., 1998). Adopting this definition, therefore, the effective demonstration of emotional intelligence at work would require an individual to simultaneously possess a high capacity of each aforementioned developmental lines underpinning human potential.

A similar logic applies when an individual is considering the intentional development of his or her spiritual ("what is my ultimate concern?") experience. From a spiritual perspective, the capabilities underpinning effective emotional intelligence form one – of many – aspects underpinning an individual's spiritual development (Page, 2005; Wilbur, 2006). Put another way, just as a child must learn to crawl before being able to walk and run, research suggests the relationship between emotional intelligence and the latter stages aspects of an individual's spiritual path may be hierarchical.

HOW WORKPLACE EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IMPACTS ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE AND EMPLOYEE EFFECTIVENESS

Research into emotional intelligence and workforce effectiveness suggests organizations that provide employees with the feeling they belong to a community willing to support, guide and help them through the many emotional peaks and troughs of work will be more engaged and committed (Garcia-Zamor, 2003; Gardner & Stough, 2002; L Gardner & C Stough, 2003; Lisa Gardner & C Stough, 2003). Although still contentious, academic research suggests the effective application of individual emotional intelligence at work – by leaders and employees at all levels – is a stronger predictor of organisational effectiveness than traditional intelligence (IQ) or an individual's personality (Antonakis, 2004; Garcia-Zamor, 2003; Palmer, Gardner, & Stough, 2003).

At an organisational level, effective emotional intelligence has been shown to underpin: a work team's capacity to identify and ascribe to attitudinal and behavioural norms related to more effective patterns of interacting (Druskat

& Wolff, 2001); employees capacity to recognize, understand and navigate boundary and role confusion between work teams, departments, divisions, and the organisation within the broader market context (Gantt & Agazarian, 2004) and; a sense of organisational accomplishment and trouble-free operation, as well as the development of vertical trust, organisational support, and general workplace wellbeing (Jain & Sinha, 2005).

At an individual and leadership effectiveness level, emotional intelligence is related to a leader's capability to show sensitivity and empathy towards others; build on other work colleagues' ideas; influence others to accept alternative points of view; demonstrate integrity and; act according to prevailing ethical standards by remaining consistent with one's words and actions (Barbuto & Burbach, 2006; Dulewicz & Higgs, 2003; Palmer, Gardner, & Stough, 2003; Palmer, Walls, Burgess, & Stough, 2001).

An individual's spiritual practice can further add to these positive organisational outcomes. Hoppe (2005) explored spiritually aware leadership and identified the following four attributes as applicable to any organisational context:

1. ***Commitment to the 'Inner Journey'***. Spiritually aware leaders are committed to understanding who they are by looking deep within (i.e., self-awareness) and in so doing set their spiritual compass for the search for truth, authenticity and meaning (Lowney, 2003).
2. ***A search for meaning and significance***. Just as Victor Frankl outlined how his personal search for meaning helped him survive the atrocities of *Auschwitz*, spiritually aware leaders are able to rise above the mundane nature of daily life to try to make sense of the world and their place in it.
3. ***An acceptance and expression of one's 'Wholeness'***. Spiritually aware leaders do not shy from expressing who they are – both their inner and outer worlds – to those with whom they work (Fry, 2003). They recognize that in order to generate self-understanding one must develop an understanding and acceptance of others.
4. ***An embracing of 'Connectedness'***. For many employees, the workplace has become their primary community and source of social support. The spiritually aware leader further understands the interrelationship of him or her to the organization; and the organisation with a broader market system, society and the environment, which results in increased psychological ownership of their role within the organizational system (Wagner, Parker, & Christiansen, 2003).

The development of the competencies of emotional intelligence has been found to underpin a spiritual leader's effectiveness with regard to each of these four attributes.

WHAT SPIRITUALITY IS AND HOW AN INDIVIDUAL'S SPIRITUAL PRACTICE¹ ENHANCES WORKPLACE EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE?

(¹*Spiritual practice is the repetition of acts or a series of acts (e.g., meditation) for the purpose of improving one's functioning beyond the practice itself*)

Although spirituality is increasingly a popular topic, a uniform definition of the construct remains elusive. Of the many available, the present researchers offer two definitions of spirituality provided in recent academic literature.

The first, proposed by European-based psychologist Stiffoss-Hanssen (1999), provides a definition of spirituality that crosses religious boundaries and allows for an appropriate consideration of spirituality within the context of work. Stiffoss-Hanssen proposes the following definition of spirituality, "Spirituality is people's search for meaning, in relation to the big existential questions" (p. 28). Unlike other definitions, Stiffoss-Hanssen's suggests that spirituality could include a range of characteristics such as existentialism, connectedness, authenticity, meaning in life, holism, and self and community, as aspects of an individual's spirituality. Considering these facets within a work context, employees actively striving for connectedness and authenticity; who are considerate and respectful of both oneself and the broader organisational community; and who utilize their role at work and

within an organisation to create personal meaning and congruency, are likely to be more engaged, productive and effective (King & Dave, 1999; Milliman, Czaplewski, & Ferguson, 2003; Mitroff & Denton, 1999; van Dierendonck, Garssen, & Visser, 2005). However without also demonstrating the capabilities underpinning effective emotional intelligence, individuals are equally likely to create work environments that are absent of trust, founded upon artificial harmony and plagued with poor individual and collective organisational commitment (Lencioni, 2004).

The second definition of spirituality, offered by Wheeler, Ampuda and Wangari (2002), offers a world oriented perspective of the construct. In research exploring an African-centred view, the construct of spirituality was defined as, "... the vital life force that animates and connects us all to the rhythms of the universe, nature, the ancestors, and the community (p. 73)". Such a definition of spirituality is firmly centred in a collectivist-based spirituality, with an orientation towards interpersonal relationships and the community; where nature or the environment also has a central role in one's experience of his or her spirituality. Unlike other definitions, a world-oriented consideration of spirituality believes that an individual can only know who they are after they have achieved connectedness with others, not independence (Wheeler, Ampadu, & Wangari, 2002).

Consider the organisational impact if employees adopted this View: Employees would readily acknowledge that to better understand oneself and one's work they must engage and interact with others in a collaborative and mutually respectful manner. Such a definition of spirituality is by its very nature, holistic. It is a View of spirituality that demonstrates a dual awareness of oneself as well as one's relationship with everything that is not oneself (Meehan, 2002). This holistic definition of spirituality recognizes the synchronicity of all life and the conscious commitment one makes to others (Piedmont, 1999). Within the workplace, it is also a definition of spirituality bought to fruition through the effective demonstration of emotional intelligence, specifically the competency of understanding others' emotions: respecting individual differences so as to create shared understanding, meaning and direction (Palmer & Stough, 2003; Salovey & Grewal, 2005).

In summary, workplace spirituality is

"...an experience of interconnectedness and trust among those involved in a work process, engendered by individual goodwill; leading to the collective creation of a motivational organizational culture, epitomized by reciprocity and solidarity; and resulting in enhanced overall performance, which is ultimately translated in lasting organizational excellence" (p. 283) (Marques, 2005)

WHY INTEGRATING EMPLOYEE SPIRITUALITY IN FUTURE WORKPLACES IS IMPORTANT

Academic research conducted over the past ten years (since the 'birth' of EI within academia) strongly demonstrates the central role of emotional intelligence in facilitating high employee performance, cohesive work teams, and effective organizations. When exploring human potential within an organisational context, explicitly placing spirituality and the pursuit of an intentional spiritual life research on a larger agenda is a natural progression.

It is the present authors' position that to not do so will, ultimately, result in the breakdown of the social and emotional fabric of an organisation (Fraser & Grootenboer, 2004). The following examples demonstrate our logic: consider the organisational impact of an employee who is financially astute (highly developed in the *Cognitive* line) yet ethically bankrupt (poorly developed in the *Moral* line); an employee who might be a great friend and confidant to others (highly developed in the *Interpersonal* line) but emotionally fragile within themselves (poorly developed in the *Intrapersonal* line); or an organisational leader who has dedicated his or her career to bringing about creating and driving organisational success (highly developed in the *Kinaesthetic* line) yet begins to consider past successes and their very existence as meaningless (poorly developed in the *Spiritual* line). These examples represent the importance of considering and fostering an employee's spiritual View, even if one might be focusing only on the development of his or her emotional intelligence line.

Transpersonal theorist and human potential philosopher, Ken Wilbur, suggests spiritual growth could occur both concurrently and consequently to other aspects of human potential (Wilbur, 2001). However, Wilbur does provide one caveat: the 'peak' of spiritual growth is only available to individuals who have attained latter (e.g., 'post-conventional') stages of human consciousness. Latter stages of consciousness allow the individual to concurrently consider different perspectives, and to integrate these differing perspectives and world-views without judgment or recourse. Within the workplace, this is not just understanding something new but, an entirely different way of knowing (Flier, 1995). Put another way, it is not *what* employee's think, but *how* they think (Page, 2005).

Considering the shifting territory for organisational performance – an increased need to cope and develop through massive change; an increased need to manage and interpret large amounts of information; an increased need for cross-industry and cross-market awareness – a different way of knowing is required (Cherniss, 2001; Flier, 1995). Emerging research suggests such levels of human consciousness are available to less than 10% of the world's population (Cook-Greuter, 2002; Page, 2005; Wilbur, 2006). It is the position of the present authors that latter stages of human consciousness are more readily available as a result of intentional spiritual practice and the pursuit of a spiritual life (Page, 2005). Providing employees with an awareness and understanding of their inner spiritual landscape – through which his or her job role, work colleagues and the organisation as a collective is interpreted – will result in a greater capacity for self-actualization and conscious contribution to organisational success (Page, 2005).

FUTURE DIRECTIONS IN WORKPLACE SPIRITUALITY

Little research has explicitly explored the potential negative role of spirituality for an employee or organisation. Research completed by Chandler and Holden (Chandler & Holden, 1992) presented a model of spiritual development that proposed that individuals could be too spiritual. Within an organisational context, a similar model might also apply. For example, the employee who postulates that his or her "spiritual path" is the only way, offending or alienating co-workers as a result (Milliman, Czaplewski, & Ferguson, 2003). Similarly, the employee who delivers poor business decisions as a consequence of adhering to his or her religious or spiritual beliefs. However, both scenarios only serve to highlight the importance of acknowledging and actively developing the 'whole' employee so as to avoid becoming blinded an inadequate spiritual View.

Conversely, the potential benefits for the employee in exploring workplace specific spirituality are many (Aburdene, 2005; Garcia-Zamor, 2003; Hoppe, 2005; Mitroff & Denton, 1999; Zohar & Marshall, 2004). Tightening labour markets, both within Australia and internationally, have resulted in it becoming increasingly difficult to attract and retain skilled staff. To date, most research into this emerging organisational problem has focused on Human Resource (HR) and organisational practices for managing employee expectations (Horwitz, Teng Heng, & Ahmed Quazi, 2003; Kinjerski & Skrypnik, 2004). Less research has explored the role of individual employees self-managing a suitable career. Beyond emotional intelligence development, the application of spirituality and spiritual principles to this critical organisational issue will result in improved employee tenure, increased employee motivation and enthusiasm, and greater work productivity (Aburdene, 2005); as well as the promotion of an employee's responsibility in moulding a personally meaningful career (Seligman, 2002). Clearly there are reasons beyond just organisational profit for undertaking empirically robust analyses of the role of spirituality into the workplace (Benefiel, 2003; King & Dave, 1999; Kinjerski & Skrypnik, 2004; Milliman, Czaplewski, & Ferguson, 2003).

CONCLUSION

Using spirituality-oriented practices to develop workplace emotional intelligence

The purpose of this article was to examine the interrelated role of workplace emotional intelligence and spirituality. In highlighting the relationship, the present authors demonstrated the hierarchical nature between other developmental lines of human potential (including the emotional awareness and intelligence lines) and the transpersonal aspects of spirituality (Cook-Greuter, 2002; Page, 2005). In so doing, emotional intelligence development was described as a useful precursor for providing employees with the inner capacity to better

identify, interpret and pursue the more complex aspect of spiritual experience. Just as emotional intelligence development can support an individual's spiritual growth, the practices of spirituality can be used to facilitate the enhancement of individual and organizational emotional intelligence. In brief, the following three spiritual practice considerations can also be used to supplement existing workplace emotional intelligence development initiatives:

1. **Acknowledge that spirituality is universal.** Spirituality is a universal phenomenon (Hoppe, 2005; Miovic, 2004) and, therefore, all employees will seek to find a degree of personal meaning in their work. An organization's role is to acknowledge and facilitate this process through collaborative dialogue, acceptance of diversity, and the integration of personal and collective work objectives. This initiative creates the required openness for employees to communicate the emotions they experience whilst at work: what they like and dislike; what motivates and de-motivates; when they are most positive and optimistic and when they tend to become frustrated and annoyed. This emotions-based information allows organisational leaders to re-mould work tasks to encourage greater employee engagement and retention.
2. **Encourage systems-level thinking and planning.** The more complex aspects of spiritual (and emotional) growth incorporate systems level thinking to facilitate shared awareness, understanding and commitment (Gantt & Agazarian, 2004; Lund Dean, 2004). Latter stages of spiritual development encourage an integrative spiritual View through the consideration and assimilation of multiple and competing perspectives. This initiative encourages an exploration and understanding of others' emotions, perspectives and opinions within the workplace, a factor known to contribute to employee satisfaction and retention (Nikolaou & Tsousis, 2002).
3. **Provide opportunities for introspection and the sharing of experience.** Organizations are now providing employees with access to yoga and mindfulness-based mediation classes with positive organisational benefits resulting (Aburdene, 2005). Such forums teach employees how to introspect and enhance self-awareness. Further, mindfulness-based mediation has been shown to reduce stress, facilitate a greater awareness, teach employee's how to dissociate from one's unhelpful emotions so as to better regulate them and, broaden an individual's capability for creativity and innovation (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). Further, conducting group-based coaching of emotional intelligence development (rather than solely one-on-one) creates a shared experience of common workplace challenges and successes; whilst also providing employees with the opportunity to introspect and create greater personal awareness.

To conclude, research into spirituality shows the positive impact of spiritual development on organisational performance. Fostering workplace emotional intelligence provided a strong foundation for the development of an employee's spiritual capacity which, in turn, can contribute to employee attraction, engagement and retention.

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