
Issues and Perspectives in Business and Social Sciences

The Effect of Workplace Spirituality on Employee Performance

Noraidah Abdul Latiff*

Faculty of Business, Multimedia Universiti, Melaka, Malaysia

**correspondence: noraidah.latiff@mmu.edu.my*

Abstract

Employees in the 21st century seek a work environment which allows them to find a sense of purpose at work, within an atmosphere filled with respect and courteous interactions between the employees and their surroundings. The spiritually-oriented work environment is crucial because it shapes employees' behaviour at the personal level and eventually, improves employee performance. In this paper, a theoretical framework which explains how the spiritual work environment (inner self, community and meaningful work) improves employee performance is presented. This framework can be a reference for organisations in gauging their spiritual work environment, and subsequently incorporating spiritual elements at work as a way to influence employee performance. In return, it contributes to the long-term survival and success of the organisation.

Keywords:

Spiritual Environment;
Work;
Employees;
Inner self;
Community;
Meaning of Work.

Received Jan, 2021

Accepted June, 2021

Published July, 2021

1. Introduction

Organisation survival depends upon its ability to maintain competitive advantage (Singh, 2019). One of the internal sources for competitive advantage lies in the level of employee performance whereby efficient and effective work can lead to various cost savings. Therefore, organisations will be able to focus more on research, development and innovations activities (Van Der Walt, 2018). However, the dynamic changes at global landscape exposes organisations to new external and internal challenges. For instance, the Covid-19 pandemic has forced employees to adapt to job rotations and work-from-home arrangements (Sindhu, 2020). These changes can be stressful and overwhelming, thereby tipping the work-life balance. Consequently, employees feel more of the need to integrate both work demands and personal needs. This calls attention to the need for spirituality at work. This is because, spirituality enables employees to synchronise their inner selves within a positive community setting to find meaning when performing their work (Daniel, 2019) and shapes employee behaviour and influences their performance (Bharadwaj and Jamal, 2020). Accordingly, this study attempts to explain the effect of spiritual work environment on employee performance.

2. Literature review

Harrington et al. (2001) argued that spirituality is about individuals' spirit and inner life, the realisation of real purpose and meaning in their work beyond monetary rewards and task performance, or true meaning at work. Spirituality has been linked to work ethics and the values employees place on their job and workplace, which has been found to increase with age (Mahakud and Gangai, 2015). Workplace spirituality assists individuals in acknowledging their

relationships with their groups, which affects their actions (Chen and Sheng, 2013) and provides individuals deeper perceptions about their lives and selves, and is related to mindfulness, meaning of work, sense of community, organisational values, benevolence and inner life (Joshi and Jain, 2016).

Past literatures have favourably linked workplace spirituality to various work-related outcomes, including stress (Cook and Babyak, 2019; Wadhera and Bano, 2020), career purpose, coherence as well as sense-making (Lips-Wiersma, 2002), wellbeing (Pawar, 2016; Arnetz et al., 2013), earnings management motivations (Chen and Sheng, 2013), employee commitment (Jena and Pradhan, 2018), organisational commitment (Sewwandi and Dhammika, 2020), and workplace incivility from supervisors and colleagues (Lata and Chaudhary, 2020). Chawla (2016) maintained that organisations that manage their salespeople's emotion and spiritual side will be more successful. Spiritual leadership has also been recognised as encouraging belongingness and uniqueness among diverse employees in work settings with high societal relevance (Gotsis and Grimani, 2017). In a more recent study, workplace spirituality has been found to be positively related to ethical climate, prosocial motivation, and moral judgement (Otake-Ebede et al., 2020). However, in Ayoun et al. (2015), it was determined that spirituality is not related to ethics or moral intensity. These studies, nevertheless, have not adequately link workplace spirituality to employees' performance.

Employee performance is employees' ability to achieve set objectives (Arifin et al., 2020). Pawirosumarto et al. (2017) highlight that employee performance include the extent of employee desires and efforts to accomplish his/her work. This is vital as it contributes to competitive advantage and success of a company (Daniel, 2019; Anitha, 2013). Thus far, work environment has been recognised to significantly impact employee performance (Amin and Majid, 2017). Workplace spirituality forms the work environment within which employees operates. In particular, Jurkiewicz and Giacalone (2004) argue that spiritual work environment creates distinctive work atmosphere which positively impacts employee performance.

According to Bharadwaj and Jamal (2020), employees look for an environment which resonates with their spirituality. Specifically, a spiritual work environment allows employees to associate their inner lives in finding a sense of purpose while they are working to achieve company goals (Singh, 2019). Therefore, workplace spirituality drives employee performance in return for something more than simply material rewards (Sardana, 2018). There has been an emerging and growing focus on spirituality in recent years, with a definite upward trend on spiritual work environment (Philip, 2016; Loehr and Schwartz, 2001). Ashmos and Duchon (2000) define spiritual work environment as a virtuous environment characterised by three main elements, namely inner life, as well as community and meaningful work. This implies that a spiritual work environment is present when employees have the opportunity to express themselves, establish positive community relationship and perform work that relates to their life purpose (Daniel, 2019). The key implication drawn from these findings is that organisations must consider employees spiritual well-being in order to improve their performance (Golparvar and Hassan, 2014; Gotsis and Kortezi, 2008).

3. Theoretical framework

The Meaning of Work (MOW) theory relates employees' performance to their psychology (Michaelson, 2005). Figure 1 shows the three main mechanisms to improve employee performance, namely the organisation resonance, work resonance and personal resonance in accordance to MOW. In particular, organisational resonance considers environmental support and connections, work resonance includes autonomy and self-identity and spiritual resonance incorporates values and higher purpose (Modica, 2018). This study uses the MOW theory to confirm the relationship between the three elements of spiritual work environment, namely inner-self, community and meaningful work to employee performance. The relationship between these three elements to employees' work performance is depicted in Figure 2.

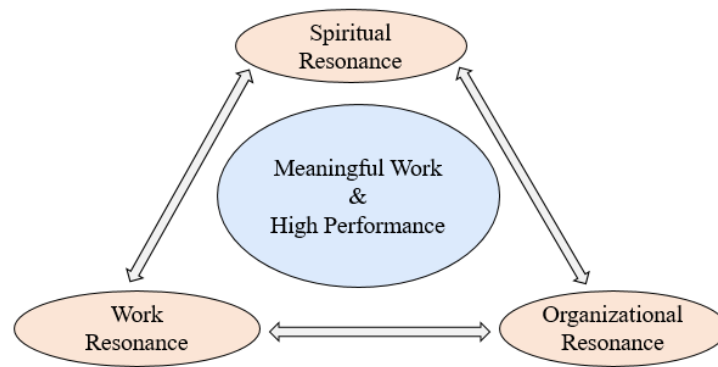


Figure 1: Meaning of Work Theory

Inner life is the first element of a spiritual work environment. It refers to a work environment where employees have the opportunities to express themselves and personify their internal values while performing work (Daniel, 2019; Fry and Nisiewicz, 2013). Hafni and Chandra (2020) studied the effect of inner life on the performance of 111 lecturers in a private university. They found a positive relationship between inner life and employee performance. The result, however, was based on a small sample - a higher education institution in Indonesia. In an earlier study, Daniel (2019) used a larger sample size with employees from health, manufacturing, education and technological sectors. The result was consistent with the finding from Hafni and Chandra's study in 2020. These findings infer that employees whose inner lives are integral to their work will have higher motivations to accomplish the jobs (Singh, 2019; Kramer and Teresa, 2011). Therefore, the first proposition for this study is:

P1: Inner life enhances employee performance.

Community is the second element of a spiritual work environment. It refers to positive interactions between employees and their surroundings (Daniel, 2019). According to Dhiman and Marques (2011), the companies Google and IKEA adopt spiritual work environments by encouraging their employees to practise self-reflection, kindness and respect. These non-egocentric practices contribute to higher level of employee performance in these companies (Hafni and Chandra, 2020). However, a more recent study by Campbell and Hwa (2014) found no relationship between community and employee performance. The limitation of this study is that it utilised Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to measure employee performance. KPIs considers quantifiable set of performance and hence, ignores intangible measurements such as employee motivation and spirituality (Shahin and Mahbod, 2007). It would have been more useful to incorporate survey questionnaires as an instrument to measure employee performance. Moreover, studies like Royal and Rossi (1996) and Fachrunnisa et al. (2014) suggested that sense of community shapes behaviour and contributes to higher employee performance. Therefore, the second proposition for this study is:

P2: Positive interaction with the community enhances employee performance.

The third component of a spiritual work environment is meaningful work. It refers to a set of activities which gives a sense of purpose to employees (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). This suggests that meaningful work goes beyond its economic function to include a sense of accomplishment, autonomy and independence (Doan et al., 2020; Wairimu, 2020; Vecchio, 1980). As a result, meaningful work becomes an intrinsic motivation which drives employee performance (Bowie, 1998). Studies by Daniel (2019) and Claes and Quintanilla (1994) found positive relationship

between meaningful work and employee performance. The main implication drawn from these findings is that the sense of purpose derived from meaningful work provides employees with internal cues and energy to keep their focus in the midst of the demanding and fast-paced working atmosphere (Kendall, 2019; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). Accordingly, the third proposition for this study is:

P3: Meaningful work enhances employee performance.

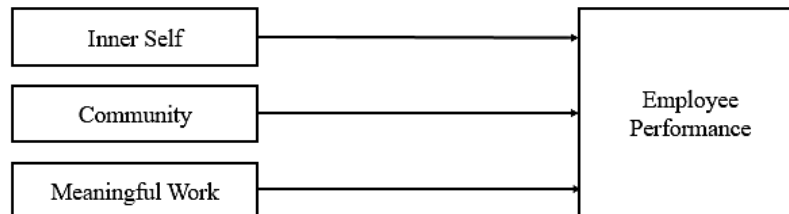


Figure 2: Research Framework

4. Conclusion

Organisations can provide employees with a spiritual work environment which can help them harness spirituality by encouraging employees to engage with their inner self, develop a sense of community and find a sense of purpose while performing work-related activities. It is crucial for companies to provide a spiritual work environment to employees in the midst of the current challenges being faced, especially the Covid-19 outbreak. The pandemic has changed the ways employees work and hence, the provision of a spiritual work environment will help develop their spiritual potential and can lead to higher levels of work performance. Inner selves can be developed either via religious activities, meditations, or recreations. These activities should be supported and encouraged by organisations by providing the place, coaching, as well as awareness. Community activities by employees, either by themselves as individuals or their participation in the organisation's community events must be recognised adequately. It is also imperative that organisations develop a strong community relations department that will look into community-related events. This helps to create awareness and eventually employees' interaction with the community. Apart from highlighting instrumental values of work and their contribution, it is also imperative that organisations emphasise the spiritual values of their existence and link the organisations' performance to non-financial ends.

Acknowledgement

The author acknowledges the support from Multimedia University in the completion of this paper.

REFERENCES

- Amin, B. M., & Majid, A. H. A. A study relationship work environment and employee performance on manufacturing sector in Penang, Malaysia. *Journal of Advanced Research in Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 8(1), 16-22.
- Anitha, J. (2014). Determinants of employee engagement and their impact on employee performance. *International journal of productivity and performance management*, 63(3), 308-323.
- Arifin, A. H., Raza, H., Saputra, J., & Puteh, A. (2020). The Influence of Recruitment and Career Development Towards Employee Performance: A Mediating Role Of Competence. *Journal of Talent Development and Excellence*, 12(1), 1040-1055.

- Arnetz, B. B., Ventimiglia, M., Beech, P., DeMarinis, V., Lökk, J., & Arnetz, J. E. (2013). Spiritual values and practices in the workplace and employee stress and mental well-being. *Journal of Management, Spirituality & Religion*, 10(3), 271-281.
- Ashmos, D. P., & Duchon, D. (2000). Spirituality at work: A conceptualization and measure. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 9(2), 134-145.
- Ayoun, B., Rowe, L., & Yassine, F. (2015). Is workplace spirituality associated with business ethics? *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 27(5), 938-957.
- Bharadwaj, S., & Jamal, M. T. (2020). In Search of Spiritual Workplaces: An Empirical Evidence Of Workplace Spirituality And Employee Performance In The Indian IT Industry. *International Journal of Scientific & Technology Research*, 9(3), 1116-1124.
- Bowie, N. E. (1998). A Kantian theory of meaningful work. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 17(9), 1083-1092.
- Campbell, J. K., & Hwa, Y. S. (2014). Workplace spirituality and organizational commitment influence on job performance among academic staff. *Jurnal Pengurusan* (UKM Journal of Management), 40, 115-123.
- Chawla, V. (2016). Workplace spirituality governance: impact on customer orientation and salesperson performance. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 31(4), 498-506.
- Chen, M. C. & Shenf, C. W. Workplace Spirituality and Earnings Management Motivations. *International Journal of Business & Information*, 8(2), 267-298.
- Claes, R., & Quintanilla, S. A. R. (1994). Initial career and work meanings in seven European countries. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 42(4), 337-352.
- Cook, K. L., Jr., & Babyak, A. T. (2019). The Impact of Spirituality and Occupational Stress among Middle School Teachers. *Journal of Research on Christian Education*, 28(2), 131-150.
- Daniel, J. L. (2019). Trust as a Mediator of Workplace Spirituality and Job Performance. *Journal of Business and Behavioural Sciences*, 31(2), 80-103.
- Dhiman, S., & Marques, J. (2011). The role and need of offering workshops and courses on workplace spirituality. *Journal of Management Development*, 30(9), 816-835.
- Doan, T. M. I., Pham, H. Q., & Tran, T. M. P. (2020, May 05). *Impact of meaningful work on elderly people's intention to continue working after retirement: A Vietnamese study* [Web Conference]. E3S Web of Conferences, France.
- Fachrunnisa, O., Adhiatma, A., & Mutamimah, M. (2014). The Role of Work place Spirituality and Employee Engagement to Enhance Job Satisfaction and Performance. *International Journal of Organizational Innovation*, 7(1), 15-35.
- Fry, L. W., & Nisiewicz, M. S. (2013). *Maximizing the triple bottom line through spiritual leadership*. Stanford University Press.
- Golparvar, M., & Abedini, H. (2014). The relationship between spirituality and meaning at work and the job happiness and psychological well-being: A spiritual-affective approach to the psychological well-being. *International Journal of Management and Sustainability*, 3(3), 160-175.
- Gotsis, G., & Grimani, K. (2017). The role of spiritual leadership in fostering inclusive workplaces. *Personnel Review*, 46(5), 908-935.
- Gotsis, G., & Kortezi, Z. (2008). Philosophical foundations of workplace spirituality: A critical approach. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 78(4), 575-600.
- Hafni, L., & Chandra, T. (2020). The Role of Workplace Spirituality in Improving Job Satisfaction and Lecturer Performance. *Talent Development & Excellence*, 12(3), 1262-1282.
- Harrington, W. J., Preziosi, R. C., & Gooden, D. J. (2001). Perceptions of Workplace Spirituality Among Professionals and Executives. *Employee Responsibilities & Rights Journal*, 13(3), 155-163.
- Jena, L. K., & Pradhan, S. (2018). Workplace spirituality and employee commitment. *Journal of Enterprise Information Management*, 31(3), 380-404.
- Joshi, P., & Jain, A. (2016). What Makes a Workplace Spiritual: A Conceptual Framework Describing Antecedents and Outcomes of Workplace Spirituality. *Purusharta*, 9(1), 98-105.
- Jurkiewicz, C. L., & Giacalone, R. A. (2004). A values framework for measuring the impact of workplace spirituality on organizational performance. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 49(2), 129-142.

- Kendall, M. (2019). Workplace spirituality and the motivational impact of meaningful work: An experimental study. *Journal of Organizational Psychology*, 19(2), 74-92.
- Kramer, S., & Amabile, T. M. (2011). *The Progress Principle: Using Small Wins to Ignite Joy, Engagement, and Creativity at Work*. Harvard Business Review Press.
- Lata, M., & Chaudhary, R. (2020). Workplace Spirituality and Experienced Incivility at Work: Modeling Dark Triad as a Moderator. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 1-23.
- Lips-Wiersma, M. (2002). The Influence of Spiritual "Meaning-Making" on Career Behaviour. *Journal of Management Development*, 21(7), 497-520.
- Loehr, J., & Schwartz, T. (2001, January). The making of a corporate athlete. *Harvard Business Review*, 79(1), 120-128.
- Mahakud, G. C., & Gangai, K. N. (2015). The Influence of Workplace Spirituality on Organisational Commitment among Public Sector Employees. *Journal of Organisation & Human Behaviour*, 4(1), 37-46.
- Michaelson, C. (2005). Meaningful motivation for work motivation theory. *Academy of Management Review*, 30(2), 235-238.
- Modica, S. (2018, May 16). *Evolving Meaning of Work (MOW) Theory for High Performance*. International Network on Personal Meaning. <https://www.meaning.ca/article/evolving-meaning-of-work-mow-theory-for-high-performance/>.
- Otaye-Ebede, L., Shaffakat, S., & Foster, S. (2020). A Multilevel Model Examining the Relationships Between Workplace Spirituality, Ethical Climate and Outcomes: A Social Cognitive Theory Perspective. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 166(3), 611-626.
- Pawar, B. S. (2016). Workplace spirituality and employee well-being: an empirical examination. *Employee Relations*, 38(6), 975-994.
- Pawirosumarto, S., Sarjana, P. K., & Mughtar, M. (2017). Factors affecting employee performance of PT. Kiyokuni Indonesia. *International Journal of Law and Management*, 59(4), 602-614.
- Philip J. W. S. (2016). Workplace spirituality: A tool or a trend? *HTS Theological Studies*, 72(4), 1-5.
- Royal, M. A., & Rossi, R. J. (1996). Individual-level correlates of sense of community: Findings from workplace and school. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 24(4), 395-416.
- Sardana, A. (2018). Workplace spirituality and managerial effectiveness. *Global Journal of Enterprise Information System*, 10(1), 67-74.
- Sewwandi, D. K., & Dhammika, K. A. S. (2020). Impact of Workplace Spirituality on Organizational Commitment of Academic Staff: An Empirical Study in the Public Universities of Sri Lanka. *South Asian Journal of Management*, 27(4), 7-32.
- Shahin, A., & Mahbod, M. A. (2007). Prioritization of key performance indicators. *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management*, 56(3), 226-240.
- Sindhu, J. S. (2020, April 01). Unrestricted thoughts - Work from home. *The Star*. Retrieved from <http://www.thestar.com.my/business/business-news/2020/04/01/unrestricted-thoughts---work-from-home>.
- Singh, S. (2019). The Impact of Workplace Spirituality on Employees' Productivity and their Wellbeing. *Global Journal of Enterprise Information System*, 11(1), 54-63.
- Van der Walt, F. (2018). Workplace, spirituality, work engagement and thriving at work. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 44(1), 1-10.
- Vecchio, R. P. (1980). The Function and Meaning of Work and The Job: Morse and Weiss (1955) Revisited. *Academy of Management Journal*, 23(2), 361-367.
- Wadhera, T., & Bano, S. (2020). The Role of Workplace Spirituality and Emotional Stability in Occupational Stress Among College Teachers. *IUP Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, 19(3), 41-67.
- Wairimu, J. (2020, July 08). *Work Meaningfulness in Digital Independent Work Transformation* [Conference Proceedings]. Americas Conference on Information Systems, America. <https://bit.ly/3nStNuT>.
- Wrzesniewski, A., Dutton, J. E., & Debebe, G. (2003). Interpersonal sensemaking and the meaning of work. *Research in Organizational Behaviour*, 25, 93-135.