

Workplace Spirituality & Indian Ethos

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Abstract

Every civilization has a hidden code – a set of rules or principles that run through all its activities programming the behavior of millions and spreading across the planet like a wave. Driven by 'Spiritual Consciousness' this 21st century is witnessing a new wave of civilization whose last bastion is the workplace. This expression of 'spiritual consciousness' at the workplace is being called 'Workplace Spirituality and also 'Organizational Fourth Wave'. A review of the manifestation of 'workplace spirituality' reveals that businesses are using spirituality more as a tool to address motivation and productivity issues, rather than as a scaffold to bring about a cultural change in business thinking and behaviour. Restricting spirituality to only the metaphysical dimension of life is one common error that we make. The Indian philosophy is the oldest living tradition and its ethos centers around the dynamics of improving life. It is based on the principle of oneness in creation and integrates the spiritual and physical dimensions of human existence through righteousness (Dharma). Wealth creation is considered to be one of the main goals of life; hence, religion and business have always co-existed and are responsible for all human growth and evolution in the Indian tradition.

The genesis of the 21st century phenomenon 'Workplace Spirituality' rests in the West of the late 1900s. Rooted in business economics, science and religion, it is an attempt to accommodate the expression of 'spiritual consciousness' in the workplace in accordance to the demands of the emerging 'The Fourth Wave' of economic development (Fahey, 2007). Since 1990s, the divide between man's inner (spiritual) world and his outer (physical) world created in the West is ceasing to exist and the last bastion of this integration is the workplace (Neal & Biberman, 2003). Though, 'workplace spirituality' is apparently a Western need, an aftermath of the Western exclusive philosophy (separateness between physical and supra-physical), in contrast to the Eastern inclusive philosophy (oneness between physical and supra-physical), still it would be unwise on the part of the East to ignore the same. In today's world where the geographical and political trade barriers have crumbled and the skyway has shrunk the world into a global village, 'Workplace Spirituality' has a global implication due to the enormous economic and industrial influence that the West holds over the East and world politics. *'Whatever the excellent and best ones do, the commoners follow,'* says Sri

Krishna in the Gita, and there is no doubt that the West has played a key role in industrializing the world and ushering in the 'Second Wave' (economics) mindset. Thus it can be said that 'Workplace Spirituality' is a part of the emerging civilization wherein 'human consciousness' is the prime mover and integrator of life.

The 4 Waves of Civilization

Toffler (1981:46) has said 'every civilization has a hidden code – a set of rules or principles that run through all its activities. It consists of a set of interrelated principles that programs the behavior of millions and spreads across the planet like a wave. From the economic perspective human history can be divided in four distinct developmental waves, with the Fourth Wave unfolding in this 21st century.

- The '**First Wave**' of development (8500 BC – 1700 AD) was agricultural that addressed the basic human need i.e. food and has essentially ended.
- The '**Second Wave**' of development (1700 AD onwards) was mechanization leading industrialization of the world. It has covered much of the Earth and it still continues to grow. Soaked in scientism, materialism and false supremacy of man, it stirred up new ideas, attitudes, and analogies, but at the same time it also redefined the concept of God, justice, love, power, beauty resulting in the subversion and suppression of the ancient assumptions about time, space, matter, and causality (Toffler, 1981:110). An “atomistic” view of reality was professed and propagated and the notion of oneness deliberately systematically assaulted.
- The '**Third Wave**' of development (early 1900s onwards) centers on information and knowledge. The advent of the use of the skyway (internet & telephony) effectively connected men and countries resulting in the realization of the importance of networking and sharing. A new socio-economic culture driven by demassification, decentralization and consumerism, individual rights, democratization, and internationalization of trade and movements of goods and service got triggered. This wave also manifests the growing concern for balance and sustainability and the world becoming more sensitive to issues of conservation, sanctity of life, and cooperation.
- The '**Fourth Wave**' of development (late 1900s) which is unfolding in this 21st century is rooted in 'spiritual consciousness'. Its focal point is the integration of all dimensions of life and the society taking responsibility for the whole. It is recognizing the identity of all living systems and is establishing new ways of relating and interacting that nourish both humans and nonhumans. The following seven trends underlie the Fourth

Wave, and the emergence of a new 21st century 'worldview', with Asia bucking many of these trends: (1) Shift in Consciousness, (2) Disenchantment with Scientism, (3) Inner Sources of Authority and Power, (4) Respiritualization of Society, (5) Decline of Materialism, (6) Political and Economic Democratization, and (7) Beyond Nationality, (Maynard & Mehrtens, 1993: 3-5).

The Fourth Wave philosophy is based on the fact that consciousness is primary, that the mind and spirit have a reality comparable to material objects and man is the creator of his own reality (values, assumptions, principles). The universe is a closed system and man is 'a microcosm of the macrocosm' an open system operating within the closed system (Prof Satsangi, 2006). The Fourth Wave is an affirmation of the central role of inner wisdom and inner authority in man and emphasizes on the connectedness and wholeness of everyone and everything. "Everything affects—and is affected by—everything else" (Kilmann, 2001).

Organizations and the Society

In the last 100 years based on the principle of 'perpetual succession' organizations have evolved as independent entities distinct from their organizers and owners. Becoming richer and more powerful than individuals with the ability to influence the political and legal system for vested interests (Gopinathan, 2010), they fanned a new culture of human greed for power and money. Short-term financial measures (i.e. corporate earnings and GNP) got pursued obsessively while longer-term non-material outcomes (human or societal or environmental welfare) were ignored. Instant gratification and consumption with human success being measured in material terms or by advancement within structured hierarchies became the norm (Gibbons, 1999). Commenting on the socially irresponsible behaviour of the organizations, Renesch (2006) writes, organizations are human-made organisms, associations of human-beings and to assume that their sole purpose and responsibility is to grow only in economic terms, is such an extreme view that implosions like what happened to Enron, WorldCom and other corporate collapses will become more and more commonplace. Kourie (2006) observes that modernity is no longer the panacea for the future as its one-dimensional approach has eroded spirituality in general. Further, with "might determines right" infiltrating the "democratic" structures which has led the society to transition from collectivism to individualism is having disastrous effects. Similarly Covey (1992:297) points out that to be motivated in the highest and deepest sense, people need to be intrinsically satisfied with the work they do and its outcome should contribute to society. No amount of money or experience or good relationships can substitute this need. In this background the society today is trying to rediscover the meaning and purpose of human life by challenging the prevalent models to ensure personal inner growth (self) as well as the survival and sustainability of his external world (Fris, 2006). Whether it is science, medicine, commerce or management, spirituality is finding space within their operating

paradigm.

Organizations are a part of society and their survivability hinges on their ability to adapt to their external socio-economic environment (figure 1) (Overholt et al, 2000).. Thus to align themselves to the emerging Fourth Wave world view, organizations are making room for the spiritual dimension at workplace, a dimension that has less to do with rules and order and more to do with meaning, purpose, and a sense of community (Ashmos and Duchon, 1998). Man and society will not allow businesses to drive and manage their lives any more, like it had done in the industrial era (Hall, 1996). Organizations need to “see, think and behave holistically”, which is a mental revolution in self-aware consciousness (Kilmann 2001). Thus the challenge before the organizations is to strike the right balance between the economic obligations of the business and the social responsibilities of the business (Walsh 2003), and bridge the gap between profit-centric and purpose-centric management (Chow, 2007).

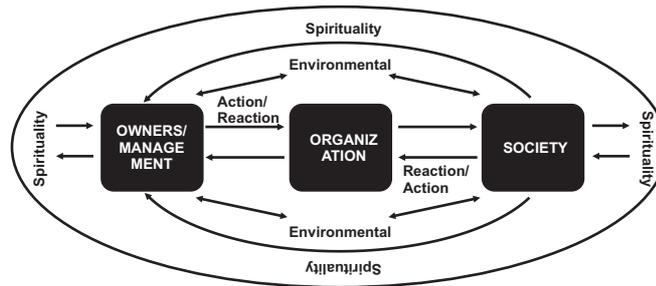


Fig. 1

Workplace Spirituality

'Workplace Spirituality' is neither anti-business nor practice of personal spirituality at workplace, as believed by some. It is harnessing the characteristics of the “spirit” in the work environment and conducting business in a socially responsible manner which promotes internal and external co-creation and development. Marglis and Walsh (2003) through their study clearly demonstrate the positive correlation between an organizations 'socially responsible behaviour' and its financial performance. Between 1972 and 2002 they examined 127 published studies and observed that 54 (43%) showed a positive correlation, 7 (5%) negative, and the balance showed either non-significant correlation or mixed correlation. “Workplace spirituality” is fostering operational management wisdom. Wisdom is a product of spirituality and it helps in building the organization's intrinsic morality (reflexive discretion between right and wrong, self-interest and selfishness) a necessity for peaceful and harmonious co-existence and growth.

A review of the present manifestation of 'Workplace Spirituality' suggests that majority of

the organizations are trying to 'retrofit' spirituality into the existing scheme of things. Spirituality is being used more as a tool to address leadership, employees' motivation and productivity issues, rather than as a scaffold to structure businesses and enhance their sustainability and growth quotient. Karakas (2010), reviewed 140 papers on workplace spirituality and observed that some companies like Coca-Cola, Boeing and Sears have incorporated spirituality in their workplaces, strategies or cultures (adopted practices include - Bible, Quran, or Torah study groups; voluntary prayer groups; "higher power lunches"; interfaith dialog groups; introspection sessions; meditation exercises; etc.); while some like The Body Shop and Tom's of Maine have incorporated spirituality into their strategies within the framework of corporate social responsibility. Further, he observed that organizations are confused about what constitutes 'workplace spirituality' and how it influences organizational culture. Commenting of the above trend Lozano and Ribera (2005) caution 'that one should not manipulate or fool around with spirituality. It is too critical; it goes to the heart of the matter, the essence of the human condition, and it is the keystone of a certain vision of reality. There is no hypocrisy in spirituality. Spirituality is neither a business opportunity nor a management tool. It should not be used to develop corporate reputation. It is essentially a free, non-utilitarian option. God's name should not be used in vain (paraphrasing Exodus 20, 7).'

Spirituality

Spirituality being a personal attribute means different things to different people, hence a variety of definitions. According to Griffin (1988: 1-2) spirituality is an inherent human characteristic that does not intrinsically infer any religious meaning - Everyone has a type of spirituality, even if it be a nihilistic or materialistic spirituality. Mitroff and Denton (1999: 86) define spirituality as "the basic feeling of being connected with one's complete self, others, and the entire universe". Dehler and Welsh (1994) links it to a feeling that energizes action. Ashmos & Duchon (2000) discuss spirituality in the context of community work. Benner (1989) believes that spirituality involves the process of establishing and maintaining a relationship with God; while Wigglesworth (2002) opinions that spirituality enables one to go beyond his ego-self or constricted sense of self and has two components: the vertical (sacred, divine, timeless, higher power, ultimate consciousness) and the horizontal (service to our fellow humans and to the planet at large). Markow and Klenke (2005) have identified more than seventy definitions of 'spirituality at work'. Moreover, very few authors have attempted to highlight how spirituality influencing culture (Olivera, 2004).

Based on the Indian belief system of 'oneness in reality', the spirit is the core of existence and the principle of conscious life; what pertains to it or consists of it is spiritual; and the quality or fact of being spiritual is known as spirituality. Hence, for the authors spirituality means "harnessing the characteristics of the spirit that rests in oneself and living by them".

According to Swami Nikhilananda (website) 'spirituality is leading a highly rational, value based and active life culminating in Self-Knowledge'. Sri Ramakrishna (website) describes 'truthfulness as the sole spiritual discipline in the Kaliyuga for people engaged in worldly activities'.

The “spirit” possesses infinite spiritual energy (with attendant features of supreme energy, intelligence, refulgence and bliss) and is responsible for this entire creation. All other forces (mental or physical) of nature have been evolved by the association of this spirit with media (physical or mental) of different kinds, (Prof. Satsangi, 2006). The spirit having infinite power, when it bears upon matter it leads to material development, when it is made to act upon thoughts it leads to intellectual development, and when it acts upon itself it makes man a God (Swami Vivekananda – <http://thinkexist.com/quotation/infinite-power-of-the-spirit-brought-to-bear-upon/357177.html>).

Indian Ethos

Indian philosophy has often been criticized for being devoid of ethics or moral philosophy (Matilal 1989 p5; Deutsch 1969 p 99). It is true that Vedanta does not contain an articulate code of morality derived from an acknowledged ethical ideal and the problems of modern ethics are not explicitly raised, but answers to them are available in the suggestions contained in it (Radhakrishnan 1914). Max Mullar says: “The Vedanata philosophy has not neglected the important sphere of ethics; but, on the contrary, we find ethics in the beginning, ethics in the middle, and ethics in the end”. The Indian philosophy is the oldest living tradition with a definite ethical doctrine derived from its metaphysics giving it the capacity to improve life - the core test of any philosophical system (Radhakrishnan, 1914). It is based on the principle of oneness in creation (single point reality with multiple manifestations of different shades) and integrates the spiritual and physical dimensions of human existence through righteousness (Dharma). It considers 'wealth creation' as one of the main goals of life and does not look down upon man fulfilling his desires till the time they are pursued in a selfless manner. Chatterjee (2009) observes that the ancient Indian tradition was not only concerned with deeper philosophical and spiritual issues of human values, but also dealt in details the universal questions of individual behaviour, models of social functioning, leadership and organizational governance.

Without getting into the philosophy behind the Indian ethos, the authors choose to focus on the fundamentals that have a direct bearing on 'workplace spirituality' and have been deciphered by the masters:

- *Creation:* The entire creation has taken place from a single source of pure spirituality “the spirit” which pervades the entire creation in a graded manner with the help of media

(mind and matter) of different kinds. The spiritual quotient of a particular dimension is always higher than that of its immediate lower dimension. The whole universe is like one country and the creation the family of God.

- *Man*: Man is essentially a spiritual being and functions in accordance with his consciousness level (awaken spirituality). Being the 'microcosm of the macrocosm', he possesses the ability to ascend to higher levels of consciousness. Thus, 'man's divinity is not an actuality, but a potentiality - He is a part of God aspiring to be the whole - He is dust and deity - God and brute crossed - It is the task of the moral life to eliminate the non-divine element, not by destroying it, but by suffusing it by divine spirit' (Radhakrishnan, 1914)
- *Inviolable Law*: The creation functions on the inviolable law of 'cause and effect' which makes things take place. It functions impersonally whether or not one believes in it and whether or not one formally adheres to a certain creed or religion (Swami Prabuddhananda, 2002). The other inviolable law is of harmony and interdependence.
- *Evils of Human Mind*: Lust (*Kama*), anger (*Krodha*), greed (*Lobh*), attachment (*Moha*), pride (*Mada or Ahankar*) and jealousy (*Matsarya*) are the six human weaknesses which if not reined push man's spirituality into the background and making all his acts beastly in nature.
- *Moral & Rational Life*: "The Vedanta requires us to respect human dignity and demands the recognition of man as man. To a Vendantin nothing human is alien. No man has a right to isolate himself from the life of the whole. The individual's life is not a means to the satisfaction of his personal desires, but is a trust for humanity. This Vedantic ideal of love, fellowship, and self-sacrifice is not the vain fancy of a dreaming poet sighing after an impossible Utopia, but is the logical outcome of a rational reflection upon man's place in the cosmos..... Rational life means a life governed by the principle of '*Dharma*' (righteousness) - a life not of zero desires but a life of regulated desires." (Radhakrishnan, 1914). Contemplation, control over senses, conscious decision making (think before you act), selfless action are some of the action points for leading a rational life.

Indian Ethos Based 'Workplace Spirituality' Model

Any management model, has two components i.e. the tools which assist in analyzing and generating information and the other is the human decision making based on the information generated by the tools. While the tools have a uniform applicability across cultures, human decision is driven by the consciousness level of the decision maker. It is truism that if businesses and organizations are stripped off their 'profit motive' they would fail to deliver and all growth would come to a halt. The tool in the instant case is 'economics' and in Indian ethos no tool is considered wrong and bad in itself. The problem and solution always rests in

the choices that we humans make. As the objective of any 'workplace spirituality' is to bring about a cultural change in the 'workplace environment', the mechanics of 'initiating change – managing change – sustaining change' form the crux of the Indian ethos based 'workplace spirituality' model (figure 2). The model uses spiritual values as a scaffold duly supported by the positive intent of the Board to initiate the change for a new culture (organizational consciousness/ management by consciousness). Since all cultural changes take time to manifest it becomes imperative to have a change management mechanism in place and the model caters to it in the form of a 'culture officer'. The rewards of 'socially responsible behaviour' viz. are enhanced societal acceptance and support, increased sustainability and being looked at favorably by investors become the change sustenance factor.

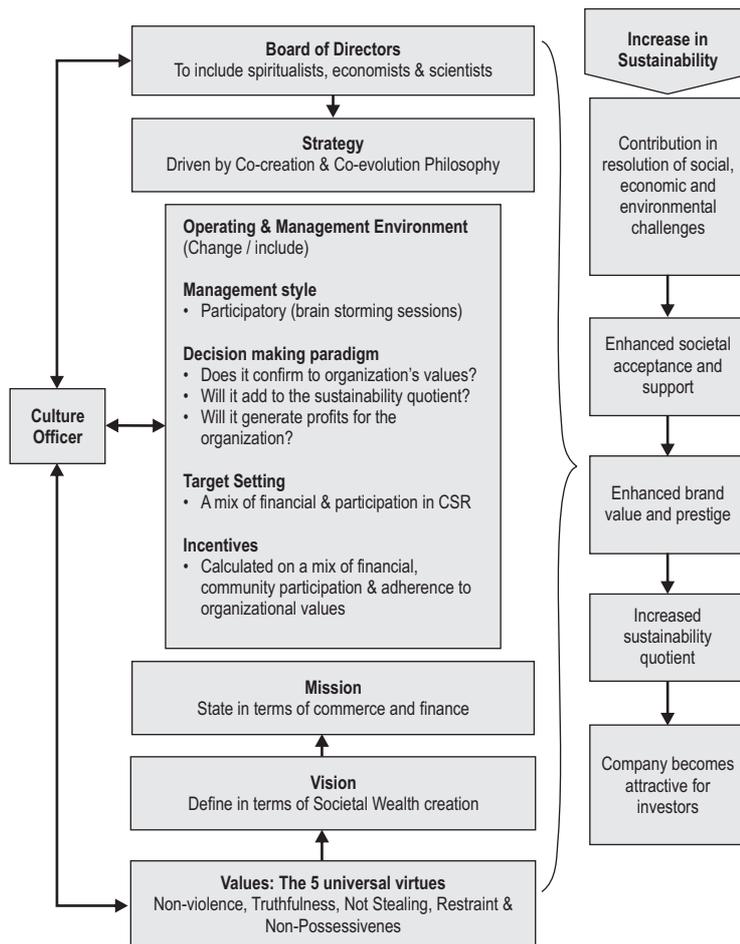


Fig. 2

The Model in Operation

The model operates on the premise that spirituality and economics have always co-existed and have evolved in parallel through the ages (Swami Vivekananda). The only word of caution is that the organization will need to keep a firm resolve that it shall not fall prey to greed for money and power, opportunities for which would be aplenty enroute. Sri Aurobindo (1987:14) says “Money is the visible sign of a universal force, and this force in its manifestation works on the vital and physical planes and is indispensable to the fullness of the outer life. This is indeed one of the three forces – power, wealth, sex – that have the strongest attraction for the human ego and the Asura and are most generally misheld and misused by those who retain them. The seekers or keepers of wealth are more often possessed rather than its possessor”.

The Board of Directors are the pivot of any organization. Their decisions are like mandates and subordinates usually do not challenge them for various reasons, thus for the success of any scheme/model their commitment and blessings are of prime importance. To facilitate 'workplace spirituality' (development of organizational consciousness) without sacrificing the growth and sustainability, it is suggested that the Boards should co-opt a spiritualist, a economist and a scientist as directors. Spirituality, business economics and science are the three disciplines of knowledge that are responsible for all human growth and evolution. These three experts, besides assisting the Board to establish holistic sustainable future growth plans, will also assist in addressing prevailing social, economic and environmental challenges. Further, the spiritualist will act as a 'culture auditor' and help in the resolution of culture change challenges.

Values: Usually it is the vision of the promoters that forms the starting point of any business. However, in the proposed model, the five virtues (values) of Non-violence, Truthfulness, Not Stealing, Restraint and Non-Possessiveness which form the basis of a rational and moral life as per Indian ethos have been taken as the starting point. These values along with the Board's commitment lay down the operational framework, within which all activities of the organization will need to be undertaken. When practiced earnestly in personal or professional sphere, each virtue has a profound and distinct positive impact on human personality. They tend to crush the evils of lust, anger, greed, attachment, pride and jealousy, and make the environment fit for co-development and co-evolution. Use of these virtues as the structural foundation of the organization sends a clear message to all internal and external stakeholders about the organization's ethical intent which would become more and more profound as the organizational consciousness develops. Further, it will also act as a deterrent for internal and external stakeholders who for whatever reason want to operate outside the organization's value system.

Vision and Mission are the two important public statements of the organization's future journey. Since business is society dependent be it raw material, manpower, other resources or customers, it needs to take socio-economic approach rather than a pure economic approach. It needs to demonstrate 'socially responsible behaviour' in order to gain societies acceptance and support leading to sustainability. Hence to strike a balance between the business economic goals and social goals, it is proposed that vision be stated in societal wealth creation terms and the mission in monetary and commercial terms in order to generate resources to fulfill the vision.

Strategy means how to take forward a particular task or job, or how to accomplish the same. It is not static in nature and keeps changing in accordance to the various internal and external factors; however, the deliverables do not change. In this model it is proposed that all strategies should be framed around the mechanics of co-creation and co-evolution. This will promote co-operation between the members of the organization but also between the organization and its other stakeholders. Further, it will create an opportunity for all to grow and evolve in their respective space. The natural laws of harmony and interdependence will come into play and enhance the organization's acceptance and brand value in the societal eyes, provided it supplies quality products and services at reasonable profits and demonstrates 'social responsiveness' in its behaviour.

Cultural Officer is a very new concept. 'Workplace Spirituality' is a social change and social changes do not come easy. The role of the cultural officer would be of a friend, philosopher and guide to the employees of the organization. He/she would be independent of the human resource department, with the sole responsibility of developing 'cultural change initiation – management - sustenance' strategies and facilitating them. Besides resolving queries of employees and motivating them to practice the organization's values, the cultural officer will also act as the organization's spokesperson on issues of sustainability & ethical growth and position the organization as a 'conscious organization' in the public eyes.

Operating and management environment: It goes without saying that to be successful in business you need to operate it the business way. Since, in this 21st century the 'business way' means a socio-economic business approach i.e. 'socially responsible business', a 4 point action plan is proposed that will actualize the inculcation of spiritual values in the organization's management and operational environment and help in making it socially responsible.

The first is participatory management. This does not mean that for every decision all employees need to be consulted. All it means is that an open platform be provided to

employees, where they can brain storm on various organizational issues. It is often seen that people having an evolved consciousness, throw up certain ideas or point out certain truths which totally change the perception of the problem. Secondly, participative management also tends to foster affinity across levels and ranks within the organization and also gives the satisfaction to an employee of being heard and adding value to the organization.

The second is the decision making paradigm. The answer to the posed three questions will make the decision taker conscious of the nature of his decision and if outside the framework of organization's values, he/she will be compelled to revise the decision. On the organizational level it will also serve the purpose of 'organizational soul searching' and on the member's level that of individual soul research.

The other two factors are target setting and incentives. Setting targets in financial terms will ensure the generation of economic wealth and the target in terms of participation in CSR activities, will keep the employee socially conscious a requirement of the 21st century. Since, the incentives are also based on financial and non-financial achievements; employees performance will also focus on societal wealth creation in their own self-interest.

Conclusion

The authors firmly believe that the above 'Indian Ethos Based Workplace Spirituality' model is operationally feasible and efficacious in transforming the organizational culture from a pure economic stance to a socially responsible socio-economic stance. The transformation process may take time, but at the end of it the reward of 'Increase in Sustainability' awaits the organization in terms of societal support, enhanced brand value and enthusiastic investors waiting to invest in the organization.

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