Individual Differences and Workplace Spirituality: The Homogenization of the Corporate Culture

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Abstract

Workplace spirituality is a growing concern for an increasing number of organizations, employees, and job seekers. In today's tumultuous business landscape a growing number of people are looking to the workplace to fulfill their spiritual needs, while organizations are finding positive work outcomes associated with a workplace that augments workers spiritual fulfillment. There is to date, however, little research concerning the relationships between culture, individual differences, and workplace spirituality. Therefore, this paper develops propositions dealing with the spiritual homogenization of the corporate culture through the Attraction-Selection-Attrition framework, and the role of individual differences in workplace spirituality and corporate culture.

Keywords: Individual Differences, Diversity, Workplace Spirituality, Culture

Introduction

There has been a marked increase in interest regarding workplace spirituality for both researchers and employees alike. A number of reasons for this interest such as the graying of the workforce, the downswing of the economy, increased distrust of upper management, an increase in demand for longer work hours and higher profits, and recent reductions in employee retirement and health care benefits, have been theorized as some of the causes. One seemingly overlooked area of workplace spirituality is its relationship to diversity.

Purpose

One area of diversity research in organizations that is in need of progress is regarding workplace spirituality. Workplace spirituality is a somewhat uncharted frontier of diversity. Workplace spirituality, however, may have many of the same issues that other areas of diversity have such as discrimination, ethical concerns, in-group/out-group affects, and accommodation. Therefore, through further researching workplace spirituality, in the context of diversity, additional ramifications to organizations could be discovered.

The purpose of this manuscript is to build theoretical support for the need to further research some important linkages between workplace spirituality and diversity. After reviewing the spirituality literature several research voids of significant stature regarding diversity aspects became apparent. In excess of two hundred scholarly and practitioner articles were reviewed for subjects concerning workplace spirituality and individual differences. In addition, an extensive search in some of the more popular social science databases (e.g., Business Source Premier, PsycINFO, Academic Search Premier, and JSTOR) was performed to find any additional articles dealing with this issue. While several articles dealing with different religions and religious affiliations of subjects were reviewed, at present only three articles considering the relationships between spirituality and individual differences were found. There were no articles found that focused on individual differences and their effects on the constructs of workplace spirituality. Also, no articles were found dealing with individual differences and their effects on individual spirituality in organizations.

For instance, what affect does a spiritual culture of an organization have on employees, and vice-versa, as they enter the organization? Although spirituality has been touted to be transcendent of all people's religion, can it be said to transcend such individual differences as race, gender, age, education, and length of tenure, to name a few? This leads to further questions regarding the potential divisive or uniting power of spirituality. Could spirituality be another mechanism used to discriminate against those who do not share similar views about spirituality? Three main components of workplace spirituality; self-work immersion, interconnectedness, and meaning from work, have some level of general acceptance. Do these three components describe workplace spirituality equally, in all individuals, or is there some individual difference that accounts for the composition of these components?

Spirituality Defined

McCormick (1994) defines spirituality as an inner experience an individual has that can be evidenced by his or her behavior. Gibbons (2000) discusses spirituality in the context of deeply held values. Neck and Milliman (1994, p. 9) define spirituality as "expressing our desires to find meaning and purpose in our lives and is a process of living out one's set of deeply held personal values". Dehler and Welsh (1994) explain that spirituality is an individual's inner source of inspiration. "The basic feeling of being connected with one's complete self, others, and the entire universe", is how Mitroff and Denton (1999) define spirituality. Therefore, spirituality is generally viewed as some "internal substance", "a value, belief, attitude, or emotion", "that affects people's behavior" (Moore & Casper, 2006, p. 109-110).

Organizational Culture and Spirituality

First, According to Konz and Ryan (1999), the organizational culture stems from the spiritual substance within the founders and leaders of an organization. This is communicated via the organization's mission, vision, policies, and procedures. The "key to maintaining an organizational culture is the philosophy and values of the organization's leaders", (Konz & Ryan, 1999, p. 203). If we assume that the spiritual aspects of the corporate culture stem from top management teams (TMT), then three possible scenarios arise as employees enter the firm. New hire employees would bring certain spiritual values, behaviors, perspectives, and components of spirituality into the firm as they assimilated, thereby mixing there individual spirituality with that of the organizations, forming an amalgamation. Otherwise, as employees entered the corporate culture and assimilated they would refrain from what they believe to be spiritual behavior, perspectives, and components of spirituality and succumb to that of the organization. This would enable the corporate culture to be labeled an annihilation because employees' spirituality would be conformed to that of the organizations. Another possible scenario would be for individuals to keep their respective aspects of spirituality thereby aiding the development of a spiritually pluralistic corporate culture. This would mean the existence of multiple layers of spiritual culture within an organization.

Giberson, Resick, and Dickson (2005, p. 1007), found evidence that TMTs in an organization "embed their personality into the organizations they lead by surrounding themselves with individuals who are similar to themselves". This process happens through the attraction-selection-attrition (ASA) process theorized by Schneider (1987). In addition, Giberson et al. (2005) suggests that leaders in an organization are major contributors to the development of organizational environments, also via Schneider's (1987) ASA theory. As a result, the corporate culture is a direct reflection of the cumulative spirituality of the founders or top management team (TMT) of an organization. Since previous research has found evidence that organizations become homogenous with respect to the personality and values of TMT's (Schein, 1992; Giberson et al., 2005), through the ASA process (Schneider, 1987), it is likely that spirituality would also become homogenous with respect to individual differences.

TMT's establish the aspects of workplace spirituality in an organization. This is accomplished through the assertion of mission, vision, policies, and procedures. As a result, prospective employees are attracted to the spiritual environment developed within the organization. Schneider (1987, p. 442), states, "people are differentially attracted to careers as a function of their own interests and personality." Therefore, entering employees are usually those who have similar values, beliefs, and personality. So, as employees enter and are assimilated into the spiritual culture of the organization, their spiritual profiles reflect that of the TMT. Likewise, employees who are either in the organization or who enter the organization may find that they do not fit the organization. As a result, such employees will leave the organization to find one with a culture in which they have a better fit (Mobley, 1982; Schneider, 1987). This process then homogenizes the organization's culture into one where all employees share the same spiritual profiles.

Therefore, the spiritual profiles of the TMT would be reflected in the corporate culture. Hence, measuring the TMT's spiritual profiles would give a base level of corporate or workplace spirituality. Following this logic, these spiritual profiles should theoretically mesh with the spiritual profiles of a random sampling of employees. As a result, the following proposition is asserted:

Proposition 1: Organizations' modal spirituality profiles are congruent with TMT's modal spirituality profiles.

Organizational Culture, Spirituality, and Religion

Although research concerning workplace spirituality is progressing, the field has not yet attained any semblance of a minimum level of intersubjective certifiability. Many researchers believe that spirituality transcends religion (Butts, 1999; Dehler & Welsh, 1994; Mitroff & Denton, 1999). In fact, Garcia-Zamor and Jean-Claude (2003, p. 5) boldly proclaim, "Spirituality is definitely not about religion". Laabs (1995) asserts that religion should be separated from definitions of spirituality. Mitroff and Denton (1999) found evidence through qualitative means that religion was not related to spirituality. Brandt (1996, p. 4) asserts that spirituality is exclusive of the rites and rituals of religion; rather, the goals of spirituality transcend religion because they promote a "greater awareness of universal values, helping an individual live and work better and more joyfully".

While many researchers ascribe to the belief that religion and spirituality are separate and distinct, not all agree. For instance, Mohamed, Wisnieski, Askar, and Syed (2004, p. 104) proclaim that a distinction being made between religion and spirituality is "artificial and unnecessary." Hicks (2002), vehemently argues that spirituality and religion are not mutually exclusive and cannot be separated. Zinnbauer et al. (1997) found empirical evidence that religion and spirituality were significantly related.

The components of spirituality appear to have some link to the debate as to whether spirituality and religion are related. For example, MacDonald (2000) found five dimensions of spirituality; 1) beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions; 2) transcendental experiences; 3) sense of meaning for existence; 4) belief in the paranormal; and 5)

religious behavior and practice. This empirical study found evidence that religion was part of spirituality. Greenwald and Harder (2003, p. 977) used principal components factor analysis to identify four main factors of spirituality; among these was "religiosity/sacredness".

Therefore, if religion and spirituality cannot be separated, which is to say that spirituality and religion are interrelated, and spirituality is part of an organizations culture, then religion is also part of an organization's culture. This is accomplished through the TMT's direct effect on the organization's culture (Giberson, Resick, & Dickson, 2005; Schein, 1992). Therefore, the following proposition is developed:

Proposition 2: The religious affiliation of employees will be congruent with the religious affiliation of TMT's.

Workplace Spirituality and Individual Differences

Reason for Research

Diversity is an important issue for employers and employees alike. There are legal concerns of diversity such as EEOC policies and procedures, Uniform Guidelines, Constitutional Amendments, and Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, to name a few. Also, there is research that supports the notion that diversity in organizations is positively related to higher performance, problem solving, creativity, and a myriad of other positive work outcomes. Conversely, diversity is associated with some negative work outcomes such as discrimination and unfairness in hiring practices, compensation, performance appraisals, cohesion, and worker treatment.

Individual Differences

An individual's spirituality is personal and although effects of their spirituality may be seen at the surface level, the source is still a deep-level artifact. However, most researchers believe that spirituality is "something sacred at the core of all existence" (Marques, Dhiman, & King, 2005, p. 82). Spirituality is said to transcend all living things. This would lead one to believe that only slight differences could be found in spirituality based on individual differences. For spirituality to transcend such individual differences as religious beliefs, race, age, sex, and other characteristics, everyone would need to have very similar deeply-held values concerning spirituality.

Neck and Milliman (1994) contend that for some people, spirituality has many religious implications, and for others religion is separate from spirituality.   Marques, Dhiman, and King, (2005, p. 83) state "the multitude of perceptions and definitions of spirituality in the workplace is one of the issues that make this phenomenon as intriguing as it is." In a study of text passages written by subjects who were asked to define and discuss spirituality, Freshman (1999) found that definitions and applications of spirituality were as varied as the subjects. Laabs (1995, p. 60) confers that defining spirituality is quite a nebulous prospect in stating "defining spirituality in the workplace is like capturing and angel-it's ethereal and beautiful, but perplexing". In fact, Sciarra and Gushue (2003) studied the effect of White racial identity statuses on four forms of

religious orientation. One form of religious orientation that is closely related to spirituality was found to be affected by the subjects' White racial identity status. Zinnbauer et al. (1997) performed an empirical study concerning the definitions of religion and spirituality based on individual differences. One of the groups in their study was comprised of people who self reported that they were spiritual but not religious. One finding regarding this group was particularly curious. Zinnbauer et al. (1997, p. 8) found that people who considered themselves spiritual but not religious were less likely to "evaluate religiousness positively," "more likely to characterize religiousness and spirituality as different and nonoverlapping," and were "more likely to be agnostic." Sundberg, Goldman, Rotter, and Smyth (1992) found evidence of personality differences between a group of highly educated spiritualists and a non-spiritual control group.

According to Harrison, Price, and Bell (1998), deep-level dissimilarity has a negative impact on group cohesion, whereas deep-level similarity has a positive impact on group cohesion. This research provides evidence that congruence of deep-level characteristics between people has an effect on their interconnectedness. Tsui, Egan and O'Reilly III (1992) researched the effects of surface-level individual differences on organizational attachment. They found evidence supportive of a negative relationship between demographic heterogeneity and organizational attachment. Thus, there is evidence that surface-level diversity and deep-level diversity may affect the constructs of spirituality.

In summary, in order to draw the conclusion that spirituality transcends all humanity and all associated individual differences, it would be necessary for everyone's deeply-held values and beliefs to be homogenous. There is presently little research that supports this conclusion. Far greater support can be found in the literature that spirituality, being a deep-level issue, is a construct that may vary across individuals.

Spirituality in this manuscript has been defined as "some internal substance—a value, belief, attitude, or emotion that affects people's behavior" (Moore & Casper, 2006, p. 109-110). Values, beliefs, and attitudes are socially constructed within individuals depending upon their interaction with the world around them. This has been extensively studied in social-psychology by Mead, Cooley, Goffman, Simmel, and Azjen and Fishbein, to name a few. Thus, if spirituality is an expression of an individual's values, beliefs, and attitudes then spirituality will vary dependent upon individual differences. Since little theoretical support is available to pinpoint a specific individual difference, basic demographics will be a starting point. These demographics will include race, sex, age, and education level.

As a result, spiritual profiles can seemingly vary according to individual differences. Since there is some evidence that TMT's homogenize their organizations through the ASA process (Giberson et al. 2005), employees with greater individual differences could have quite different spiritual profiles. Therefore, as the disparity between TMT's individual differences and employees' individual differences increases, their modal spiritual profiles will increasingly be dissimilar. Thus, the following propositions:

Proposition 3a: As the individual differences of TMT's vary directly with the individual differences of employees, the modal spiritual profiles of TMT's will vary directly with the modal spiritual profiles of employees.

Proposition 3b: As the individual differences of TMT's vary indirectly with the individual differences of employees, the modal spiritual profiles of TMT's will vary indirectly with the modal spiritual profiles of employees.

Spiritual Profiles

As stated previously, the workplace spirituality field has only a minimum level of agreement on the constructs of spirituality. There are currently no intersubjectively certified constructs. Three main constructs, however, do have some support; self-work immersion or holism, interconnectedness, and self-actualization or meaning from work.

Self-Work Immersion

Bell and Taylor (2001) use terms such as "holism" and "wholeness" to describe the concept of bringing one's spiritual faculties to work. Czikszentmihalyi (1990) described this notion as "flow", while Dehler and Welsh (1994) discuss the concept of self-work immersion in terms of organizational development activities. Krahnke, Giacalone, and Jurkiewicz (2003), discuss this component as a framework of organizational values designed to support such aspects of spirituality.

Interconnectedness

The spiritual component of interconnectedness can generally be defined as a feeling of being part of something greater than self, yet interdependent (Mitroff & Denton, 1999). Interconnectedness is defined as a relationship with others that fosters positive feelings, according to Jurkiewicz and Giacalone (2004). Bell and Taylor (2001, p. 2) suggest, "work organizations are our most significant community, replacing institutions such as the church". Mitroff and Denton (1999, p. 83) state "If a single word best captures the meaning of spirituality and the vital role that it plays in people's lives, that word is interconnectedness".

Self-Actualization

This component of spirituality has often times been discussed in terms of Abraham Maslow's 1943 work on motivation—self-actualization. Burack (1999) defines self-actualization in the realm of spirituality as the meshing together of the mind via work. The full potential of an individual is developed through work at the self-actualization level, according to King and Nicol (1999). Moore and Casper (2005, p. 10) assert, "The common theme in using Maslow's term of self-actualization is that it usually entails both the mental and spiritual aspects of the individual and work as a component" of spirituality.

Individual Differences and the Constructs of Spirituality

Although each of these constructs is discussed in terms of spirituality, each construct is a separate and distinct measure. Milliman, Czaplewski, and Ferguson (2003) found empirical support for each of these constructs as distinct measures upon performing a factor analysis. In addition, Moore and Casper (2005; 2006) performed a confirmatory factor analysis with proxy measures which provided evidence that each construct was distinct with minimal intercorrelation. Additional empirical support for these constructs was found by Sheep (2004) in analysis of spirituality and person-organization fit. Therefore, each of these constructs can be measured independently. The relative scores for each of these measures would be an aggregate score for an individual's spirituality. As a result, these aggregate scores, referred to in this manuscript as spiritual profiles, could be compared.

Since each of these constructs is a distinct measure, some variance related to the individual and each construct should be expected. In the spirituality field, however, there is minimal research concerning individual differences and their relationship to each of the three accepted constructs. Most research has focused on the aggregate of these constructs and individual differences, however small. Thus the following propositions are asserted:

Proposition 4a: Self-work immersion scores will vary according to each of the individual differences (e.g. religious beliefs, race, age, and sex) respectively.

Proposition 4b: Interconnectedness scores will vary according to each of the individual differences (e.g. religious beliefs, race, age, and sex) respectively.

Proposition 4c: Self-actualization scores will vary according to each of the individual differences (e.g. religious beliefs, race, age, and sex) respectively.

Discussion

There is practical importance for researching workplace spirituality and diversity. Workplace spirituality and diversity have real world impacts on inter-organizational relationships, creativity, innovation, efficiency, commitment, and job-satisfaction, to name a few.

For instance, Bell and Taylor (2001) assert that today's organizations must begin to care for the whole employee in order to increase commitment levels, production rates, and efficiencies. According to Zinnbauer, et al. (1997), people who considered themselves spiritual and religious were more likely to feel interconnected with others (group cohesion) and exhibit self-sacrificing behavior (altruism). Krahnke, Giacalone, and Jurkiewicz (2003, p. 397) found individual level outcomes such as "increased physical and mental health of employees, advanced personal growth, and enhanced sense of self worth" associated with workplace spirituality. Moore and Casper (2005) found evidence of a significant negative relationship between factors of spirituality and

turnover intentions. According to Jurkiewicz and Giacalone (2004), organizations that welcomed workplace spirituality grew at faster rates, had higher rates of return, and increased their efficiencies more than comparative organizations who did not welcome workplace spirituality. Maclagan (1991) argued that increased ethical behavior was an organizational benefit of spirituality. Neck and Milliman (1994) found evidence that organizations benefit from workplace spirituality through the generation of increased creativity and intuition. Enhanced leadership was also found to be positively related to spirituality (Conger, 1994; Moore & Casper, 2006). Another well researched positive organizational change that has been found to be positively related to workplace spirituality is empowerment (Lee, 1991). If high levels of workplace spirituality are significantly related to positive work outcomes, then logically organizations could potentially benefit from developing spirituality in their employees.

There has been considerable research regarding the effect of diversity on work outcomes. Some positive as well as negative outcomes of diversity in organizations have been researched. For example, Richard (2000) found evidence that cultural diversity added value and contributed to competitive advantage in a study of banking employees. Cox and Blake (1991) argued persuasively that diversity could be a source of competitive advantage. Evidence that supported more cooperative behaviors by culturally diverse teams as compared to culturally homogenous teams was found by Cox, Lobel and McLeod (1991). Some negative outcomes of diversity in organizations have also been researched. Wayne and Liden (1995) found evidence in support of higher performance appraisals by managers who viewed the employee as "like" them in comparison with employees viewed as "unlike" them. Compensation disparities have also been found based on individual differences. For instance, Dreher and Cox (2000) found support that differences in external labor market compensation was related to individual differences of race and sex. In addition, diversity has been found to affect hiring and discharge practices, accommodations, retail and restaurant service quality, and a myriad of human resource concerns.

While the outcomes of organizational diversity have been well researched, the relationship between spirituality and diversity is in need of further exploration. Thus, further research regarding workplace spirituality and diversity may reveal the existence of additional positive outcomes and the existence of negative organizational outcomes. In fact, since spirituality is often times more pervasive than organizational diversity, much of the areas affected by diversity may also be affected by spirituality.

Another potential implication of this research deals with the homogenization of organizations. If empirical support for propositions 1 through 3 is found, this could reveal that organizations embracing spirituality are more homogenous. This could have potential implications concerning whether spirituality is a positive or negative outcome in financial terms. In addition, these findings may imply the existence of an additional means of organizational discrimination in regards to hiring practices, advancement and promotion opportunities, and compensation distributions, to name a few.

Each part of proposition 4 deals with individual differences and the unique aggregation of individual spirituality. Human resource policies regarding aspects of workplace spirituality could be affected. Presently, workplace spirituality is thought to be transcendent of individual differences. If the findings related to these propositions suggest otherwise, then corporate wide policies enacted to develop spirituality may be

found to be inadequate. For example, if an individual scores high in interconnectedness but scores low in self-work immersion, then policies promoting interconnectedness may be sufficient while policies promoting self-work immersion may not be well suited for that individual. In addition, further implications regarding training and development opportunities could be affected. More customized and diverse spiritual development activities could be needed.

In summary, the potential implications resulting from the study of these propositions could be quite extensive. Implications ranging from positive and negative financial firm outcomes to individual employee development could be discovered. Evidence that workplace spirituality has some relationship to individual differences provides a whole new area of research.

Conclusion

The study of individual differences is a very rich field of real world implications and findings. A great deal of research has shown that a host of workplace related topics are affected by individual differences. Spirituality, on the other hand, is a growing stream of research still struggling to be defined. There is, however, a void of workplace spirituality research dealing with individual differences.

Spirituality is purported by some researchers to be transcendent of individual differences. Considerable research, however, has resulted in a contradiction to this somewhat accepted belief. Therefore, if spirituality transcends individual differences, then such things as work outcomes, compensation, cooperation, and discrimination will not be affected by spirituality. If spirituality does not transcend individual differences then work outcomes, compensation, cooperation, discrimination, etc., will be affected. This would also mean that spirituality is another characteristic of individual differences. If evidence is found that supports spirituality as a characteristic of individual differences, then a whole new stream of research would need to be developed to understand its effects. In fact, MacDonald (2000, p. 192) goes so far as to say that the "Five Factor Model of personality is incomplete, lacking a domain that addresses spirituality."

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