

THE IMPACT OF WORKPLACE SPIRITUALITY AND EMPLOYEES' WELLBEING AT THE INDUSTRIAL SECTOR: THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

In this 21st century when the world economy has been globalised, organizations are faced with more complexities, competition and structural changes which elicit the introduction of spirituality within the workplace so as to enable human hearts, spirits and souls to grow and flush so that employees and employers will become healthy, creative, innovative, compassionate and productive in all endeavors to the sustenance of the workplace. The study examined the impact of workplace spirituality on employees' wellbeing at the industrial sectors. The descriptive survey research design of the ex-post-facto type was used for the study. A total of two hundred and seventy – five (275) participants were involved in the study. The participants were drawn from three firms representing three industrial sectors (Food & Beverages, Publishing, Agro allied) in Oyo state, Nigeria. While spirituality at work is an abstract concept, this empirical finding showed that each of the three dimensions of spirituality at workplace (meaningful work, purposeful work, and sense of community/interconnectedness) has positive significant impact on the wellbeing of employees'. The study recommended that Management, Human resource personnel, Industrial Social Workers should be at alert to take into account employees spiritual lives and the value and richness of their collective potential for the wellbeing of employees and the sustenance of the workplace.

Keywords: Spirituality, Wellbeing, Workplace, Employee, Industrial Sector

Introduction

The modern world is plagued by social, economic, and environmental problems that are the result of human greed and a lack of love and compassion. These large scale problems have triggered in human kind a renewed search for harmony and peace, a search that is essentially a spiritual journey (Cacioppe, 2000). This spiritual approach recognizes that people work not only with their hands but also with their hearts or spirit (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000).

At the workplace, there exists horizontal spirituality. Horizontal spirituality at work is the desire to be of service to other people and that is demonstrated by service orientation and deep concern for others at work. Consideration towards others (showing concern) and high quality interpersonal work relationship have high worker job satisfaction, low turnover, group cohesion, group performance, and group efficiency (Bass,1990; Champoux,2000). In essence, spirituality provides employees a sense of community and connectedness which in turn increases employees commitment, belongingness, and effectiveness (Garcia-Zamor, 2003). Spirituality, therefore, can be seen as coming from within and it is beyond survival instinct of the mind. It is pertaining to our meaning and dreams, our patterns of thought, our emotion, feelings and behaviours (Turner, 1999).

Spirituality at work is not a fringe idea. In fact, spirituality at work addresses human activities relating to personal development, compassion, meaningfulness and joy at work, honesty, trust, job commitment, and wellbeing of employees (Petchsawange & Duchan, 2012). Successful organizations such as Hemlett-Packard, Tom's of Maine, Ford Motor Company (Burack, 1999), the World Bank (Laabs, 1995), AT&T, Chase Manhattan Bank, DuPont, and Apple Computer (Cavanagh, 1999), have created programmes to bring spirituality to the workplace. In Nigeria, there is dearth of research studies as to the application and impact of spirituality on employees at the workplace. The existing ones, Mojinyinola (2010) is on the study of the role of spirituality in health, illness and treatment while Ajala and Mojinyinola (2013) discussed the need for the integration of spirituality in social work education, are not on spirituality and employees' wellbeing at the industrial sector. It is against this phenomenon that this paper will examine the impact of spirituality on employees' wellbeing, definition of spirituality and its relevance to the workplace, major constructs of spirituality that are related to employees' wellbeing.

Definition of Spirituality and Its Relevance to the Workplace

Scholars have diverse opinion as to what is spirituality. A school of thought makes no differentiation between spirituality and religious practice, they assume that spirituality involves a relationship with an explicitly Christian God. At the other school of thought, any notion of a God, deity or higher power seems to have been totally excised from understanding of spirituality, and spirituality is defined only in terms of meaning or purpose in life (Crisp, 2008).

Furman, Benson, Canda and Grimwood (2005) define spirituality in terms of an attitude or approach to encompassing a search for meaning, purpose and morally fulfilling relations with self, other people, the encompassing universe, and ultimate reality. Similarly, Staude (2005), saw spirituality as a transformational process through which the different aspects of life are integrated (physical, emotional, occupational, intellectual and rational). That is, spirituality involves a connectedness to oneself, others, nature and to a larger meaning or presence. It is strongly associated with creativity, play, love, forgiveness, compassion, trust, reverences, wisdom, faith and sense of oneness.

Therefore, Karakas (2010) stated that spirituality is distinguished from institutionalized religion by being characterized as a private, inclusive, non-denominational, universal human feeling, rather than an adherence to the beliefs, rituals, or practices of a specific organized religions institution or tradition.

In the workplace context, spirituality has been defined as our inner consciousness (Guillary, 2000), a specific form of work feelings that energizes action (Dehler & Welsh, 1994), access to the sacred force that implies life (Nash & Mclennan, 2001) and the unique inner search for the fullest personal development through participation into transcendent musters (Delbecq, 1999).

Spirituality and Workers Wellbeing

The wellbeing of employees is in the best interest of communities and organisations. The workplace is a significant part of an individual's life that affects his or her life and the wellbeing of the community (Harter, Schmidt & Keyes, 2002). Therefore, wellbeing in the context of this paper is looked at from social construct, reduction in stress, burnout and workaholism and increasing workers morale, commitment to the organization and subsequent increase in productivity of workers.

Workplaces have become the bedrock for the development of community set up for employees. It has become places where people spend most of their lives, develop friendships, create value, and make their most meaningful contributions to society (Fairholm, 1996). The average adult spends much of his or her life working, as much as a quarter or perhaps a third of his waking life at work, it becomes their most important community and to some employees, the work and colleagues at work have taken the place of family or social group. The workplace has become the fountain head of community for many people (Conger, 1994). With this centrality of work in people's lives, associated problem have developed, this include stress, burnout and workaholism. Rifkin (2004) and Gini (1998) stated that workaholism has become a serious and growing problem for many Americans.

Stress induced by workaholism leads to loss of spirituality, chronic illness, pain, fatigue, fear (Killinger, 2006), while higher absenteeism, lower productivity and increase in company's expenditure in form of health compensation claims increases (Cartwright & Cooper, 1997) due to stress at workplace. Furthermore, the workplace environment and policies like: downsizing, layoffs, mergers and acquisitions, terrorism, market crashes, uncertainty (Biberman & Whitty, 1997; Cacioppe, 2000; Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003; Neal, 2000; Sparrow & Cooper, 2003) contribute to the development of workplace stress with resultant effect on reduction on employees' morale, and commitment (Brandt, 1996; Duxburg & Higgins, 2002; Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003).

Neal (1999) talked about "legitimized Schizophrenia" at the workplaces which refers to uneasy feeling of putting on masks, hypocrisy, artificially and playing to be successful. This legitimized schizophrenia leads to artificial separation from work and life with resultant results in lower productivity and higher stress and burnout. Therefore, many employees in today's workplaces feel unappreciated, unconnected (an aspect of spirituality), lost and insecure in their jobs (Sparrow & Cooper, 2003). Krishnakumar and Neck (2002) found that the encouragement of spirituality in the

workplace can lead to benefits in the areas of creativity, honesty, personal fulfillment and commitment which ultimately lead to increased organizational performance.

These problems of stress, burnout and workaholism at workplace can be solved through spirituality with a beneficial consequence for the well-being of employees. Reave (2005) pointed out the significant correlation between spirituality and mental health indices of life satisfaction, happiness, self-esteem, hope and optimism, and meaning in life. Furthermore, workplace spirituality programmes have positive effect on employees in form of increased job, serenity, job satisfaction and commitment (Fry 2003, 2005; Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003; Paloutzian, Emmons & Keortge, 2003; Reave, 2005); reduction in workers/employees absenteeism, turn over and increase in organizational productivity (Fry 2003, 2005; Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003); improvement in employees attitudes of commitment to the organization, work satisfaction and job involvement (Milliman, Czaplewski & Ferguson, 2003) and positive effects on personal well-being and job performance (Neck & Milliman, 1994).

Spirituality and Provision of Sense of Meaning and Purpose

The advent of industrial age have made organizations to concentrate on creating material wealth, putting economic goals and profitability before the social and public needs, hence the bareness of emotional and spiritual needs. As profit maximization become the main strategic objective of most workplace organizations, social, interpersonal and spiritual functions and goals of organizational life have taken a back seat in today's corporations (Gull & Doh, 2004; Hertz, 2002; Post, Preston & Sachs, 2002; Walsh, Weber & Margolis, 2003). In most of today's corporations, the central focus persists to be an observable, external, controllable, empirical, and materialistic outcomes or variables which lead to the creation of a "world without depth" (Gull & Doh, 2004) and the isolation of the soulful aspects of work life (Bolman & Deal, 1995). Gozdz (1995) contended that organizations that value positivism, reductionism, and empiricism many fall into the trap of denying the existence of spirit.

Therefore, employees and managers have started to question the success of materialistic principle to individual and collective wellbeing of people as against people's desire for more meaning and quality of life at work (Cash & Gray, 2000; Gull & Doh, 2004; Laabs, 1995; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Wrzesniewski, 2003). A large number of employees today often feel psychologically isolated and alienated at work (Bolman & Deal, 1995; Cavanagh, 1999; Harman, 1992); as well as a vacuum and lack of meaning in their work lives (Cavanagh, 1999; Dehler & Welsh, 1994; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). The compartmentalization of work, life, family and spirit may rip authenticity off employees, leaving them feeling unfulfilled, stressed and alienated (Cavanaugh, 1999; Fairholm, 1996). Johnson (2004) found that over 61% of respondents to his research think their workplaces would benefit from a greater sense of meaning and spirituality. This means that workers souls long for deeper meaning, deeper connection, greater simplicity and a connection to something higher (Oldenburg & Bandsuch, 1997).

Many employees in today's workplaces question themselves and their work, ask themselves about the essence and meaning of their work and search for a sense of purpose and meaning at work (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Cacioppe, 2000; Karakas, 2010). Researches have shown that workplace spirituality has the potential to provide employees a feeling of purpose, a sense of connection, and a sense of meaning at work (Brandt, 1996; Bolman & Deal, 1995; Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003). Organizations with stronger sense of spirituality enable employees to exercise stronger values and ethical beliefs in their workplace and empower them to show more creativity and flexibility at work (Mitroff & Denton, 1999).

Work takes new meaning and significance when it is seen as a calling, a sacred duty, a service opportunity or a way to serve God, other deities, or a higher purpose (Paloutzian, Emmons & Keortge, 2003). Therefore, when work is seen as a calling, it becomes more meaningful and subsequent increase in productivity and commitment of employees (Paloutzian et al. 2003; Reave, 2005). Their finding confirms that productivity and performance increases as a result of deeper meaning at work, as well as how spirituality at work can provide employees a sense of meaning and purpose.

Spirituality and provision of Sense of Community and Interconnectedness

The provision of a sense of community and connectedness is critical to employees in today's workplaces and corporations. The decline in the local communities and social groups that establishes a sense of connectedness (Conger, 1994) and the dissolution of traditional support systems such as church and family (Leigh, 1997) has necessitated the workplaces to have replaced them as primary sources of community for many people. Employees now seek ways and means to connect to each other and to be united in a common vision that goes beyond materialistic aims (Miller, 1998). This makes the aspects of community and connectedness in spirituality experiences very important in this recent community (workplace or organizations).

Researchers have stressed that organizations are not just machines for producing goods but that they are also forms of human community that foster satisfying and meaningful life experiences for individuals, families and society (Gull & Doh, 2004), produce significant social values and outcomes for society (Frost, Dutton, Mailis, Liliusi, Kanov & Worline, 2006; Walsh, Weber & Margolis, 2003).

Spirituality at work provides employees a sense of community and connectedness through higher levels of employee attachment, loyalty and belonging (Duchon & Plowman, 2005; Fairholm, 1996; Milliman, Ferguson, Trickett and Condemi, 1999). Spirituality is linked to positive outcomes and benefits associated with sense of community through building community (Cavanagh, Hanson, Hanson & Hinojoso, 2001) serving the need for connecting to others at work (Khanna & Srinivas, 2000) and being the source of daily expressions of compassion, wisdom, and connectedness (Maxwell, 2003).

The major components of spirituality are meaningful work, purposeful work, sense of community/interconnectedness and transcendence (Petchsawanga & Duchon, 2012). Since transcendence has been associated with religious aspect of human activities and individuals personal life (Milliman et al., 2003), it is isolated from this research which focuses on workplace and employees' wellbeing hence this research will examine the workplace spirituality (meaningful work, purposeful work, sense of community/interconnectedness) on employees' wellbeing at industrial sector.

The dearth of literature and empirical researches on spirituality and workplace in the Nigerian context has spurred this research. Mojuyinola & Ajala (2012); Ajala & Mojuyinola (2013) discussed the place of spirituality in the curriculum of Social Work Courses in Nigeria, while Mojuyinola (2012) discussed spirituality in the recovery of patients in health care sector, researches have not been done on the impact of spirituality on employees in the workplace in Nigeria. Therefore, this empirical study is looking at the impact of spirituality on employees' wellbeing in the industrial sectors in Nigeria. Two research questions are raised to assist the research, they are:

- (1) What is the joint effect of workplace spirituality (meaningful work, purposeful work, sense of community/interconnectedness) on employees' wellbeing at industries?
- (2) What is the relative contribution of workplace spirituality (meaningful work, purposeful work, sense of community/interconnectedness) to workers' wellbeing at industries?

Methodology

Research Design: The descriptive survey research design of the ex-post-facto type was used for the study. The method is adequate because it does not involve manipulation of any variable. The event has already occurred and the researcher only investigated what was already there.

Participants: A total of two hundred and seventy – five (275) participants were involved in the study. The participants were drawn from three firms representing three industrial sectors in Oyo state, Nigeria. The firms and industrial sectors are Fan Milk Nig. Plc (Food & Beverages); Macmillan Nigeria Publishing Ltd. (Publishing) and Sudith Oil & Chemical Ltd. (Agro Allied). They are privately owned establishments and are profit oriented. From each firm, one hundred (100) respondents were randomly selected. Their ages ranged between 23 years and 48 years with a mean age of 26.5 years. 195 respondents (48.75%) had tertiary education qualifications, 172 (43%) had secondary certificates and only 33(8.25%) had primary education. The least qualification of the respondents was the West

African Examination Council certificate and the highest was First Degree. Meaning that, all the respondents are literate and could understand the questionnaire properly.

Instrumentation:

The instrument used for the research was the questionnaire tagged “Workplace Spirituality and Workers’ Wellbeing Questionnaire” (WSWWQ). It was a four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Strongly Disagree (SD) and Disagree (D), with the corresponding values of 4, 3, 2, 1 respectively. The structured questionnaire was made up of four sections: A – D.

Section A – Meaningful Work: This section is an adapted six items of Milliman, Czaplewski & Ferguson (2003) “Workplace Spirituality and Employee Work Attitude: An Exploratory Empirical Assessment”. The scale contained items like ‘Experience joy in work’. This was re-validated is the present location and yielded cronbach’s alpha co-efficient of 0.90.

Section B – Purposeful Work: This section is made up of six items adopted from Petchsawange & Duchon (2012) “Workplace Spirituality, Meditation and Work Performance” The scale contained questions like “I do jobs or tasks automatically by being aware of what I am doing”. This was re-validated is the present location and yielded cronbach’s alpha co-efficient of 0.86.

Section C – Sense of Community and Interconnectedness: This section is an adapted seven items of Milliman, Czaplewski & Ferguson (2003) “Workplace Spirituality and Employee Work Attitude: An Exploratory Empirical Assessment”. The scale contained items like “Experience joy in working with colleagues”. This was re-validated is the present location and yielded Cronbach’s alpha co-efficient of 0.89.

Section D – Wellbeing: The Well-Being Scale of Fujishiro (2005) with 12 items was adapted for the study. The reliability coefficient got after re-validation was Cronbach’s alpha coefficient, 0.87.

Data Analysis

A total of 300 questionnaires were administered, out of which 275 copies that were properly filled were used for analysis. Multiple regression analysis at 0.05 level of significance was the statistical tools employed in the study to examine the contents of workplace spirituality (independent variables) and workers’ wellbeing (dependent variable).

Results and Findings

Table 1: Regression analysis showing the joint contribution of workplace spirituality on workers wellbeing in industry

Regression (R) = .785		Regression square = .615			
Adjusted R square = .611		Standard Error of Estimate = 4.7963			
<i>Analysis of Variance</i>					
<i>Source of variation</i>	<i>Sum of square</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>Mean square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Regression	9756.127	3	3252.042	144.567	.000
Residual	6069.133	271	22.495		
Total	15852.260				

Table 2: Relative contribution of the independent variables to the prediction

<i>Source of Variation</i>	<i>Unstandardized coefficient</i>		<i>Standardized coefficient</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>Sig</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>Beta</i>		
Constant	-4.211	2.052		-2.053	.000
Meaningful work	.873	.096	.427	9.122	.000
Purposeful work	.631	.088	.298	7.200	.000
Sense of community					
Interconnectedness	.519	.091	.268	5.717	.004

Table 1 shows that the three components of spirituality (meaningful work, purposeful work, and sense of community/interconnectedness) to predict employees' wellbeing in industries yielded a coefficient of multiple regression (R) of 0.785 and a multiple regression square (R²) of 0.615. The table also shows that analysis of variance of the multiple regression data yielded an F-ratio of 144.567 (significant at the 0.05 level), indicating that predicting employees' wellbeing at work due to workplace spirituality could not have occurred by chance and has accounted for 61.5% of the variance of employees wellbeing.

Table 2 shows for each component of workplace spirituality (independent variable), the standardized regression weight (β), the standard error estimate (SEB), the t-ratio, and the level of which the t-ratio is significant. The values of standardized regression weights associated with employees wellbeing indicated that meaningful work (Beta = .427) is the most potent contributor, followed by purposeful work, (Beta = .298) and sense of community/interconnectedness (Beta = .268).

Discussion of Findings and Implications

The finding showed that employees' wellbeing is guaranteed with the introduction of workplace spirituality. With employees wellbeing guaranteed, it means that workplace spirituality enhances employees' morale, commitment and productivity due to the reduction in stress and burnout. The idea of workaholism was reduced to a moderate level through workplace spirituality hence no danger to organizational productivity, and there is enhancement of wellbeing of employees. This is in line with the views of Burack (1999) that spirituality enable employees to feel complete and authentic at work; Turner (1999) that spirituality will increase organizational performance; and Bento (1994) that empowerment of employees through spirituality will make them to be more honest, courageous and compassionate individuals. Furthermore, Mitoff and Denton (1999) stated that today's organizations suffer deep spiritual emptiness as a result of spiritual impoverishment. As a result of the spiritual emptiness, managers and employees resort to meditation, reflection and spiritual practices, wellness programmes, as well as fitness and sport exercises at work as a method of coping with stress and uncertainty at work (Dehler & Welsh, 1994) and subsequent benefit for the well-being of employees (Cartwright & Cooper, 1997).

The finding further showed that workers with workplace spirituality found the work more satisfying, meaningful and perform better. Workers who can express their spirituality through their work actually find work more satisfying and meaningful and accordingly perform better. This is in line with the findings of Mitroft and Denton (1999), Gull and Doh (2004) that workers who find meaning in their work activities perform more responsibly, ethically, collaboratively and creatively at work. Furthermore, employees who incorporate their spirituality and values into their work show increasing personal satisfaction and job commitment (Dehler and Welsh, 1994; Reave, 2005); become creative and innovative, increased empowerment, more cohesive in vision and purpose, and enhance team and community building (Lips-wiersma, 2002). The building of spirituality in the workplace through a

company's philosophy builds trust and mutual respect, which in turn contribute to cooperation and sharing a sense of purpose (Burack, 1999).

The finding established that the sense in interconnectedness/community through workplace spirituality lead to the wellbeing of industrial employees. Since the level of interconnectedness of spirituality involves the mental, emotional and spirit connections among employees in teams or groups in organizations (Neal and Bennett, 2000), it means that the essence of community (workplace inclusive) involves a deeper sense of connection among people, including support, freedom of expression, and genuine caring. All these attributes guarantee wellbeing of individual at the workplace. No wonder, few firms like Southwest Airlines, have developed strong organizational culture that emphasizes a sense of community among employees. The firm has developed a culture that employees are made part of a larger organisational family, making employees take care of each other as well as their customers, and employees families are also made an important part of the workplace family (Freiberg & Freiberg, 1996; Milliman et al., 1999). This connectedness has a resultant effect on improvement in productivity and sustenance of the organization.

Recommendations

- I. For the attainment of employees' wellbeing, forms of spirituality recommended by industrial social workers in the workplace should include optional morning prayers or yoga sessions, designing multi faith prayer spaces, starting corporate chaplaincies. These will give employees mental alertness, reduction of stress and build community spirit.
- II. Since organizations that suffer from a deep spiritual emptiness have series of problems both with and among employees, managers and employees are encouraged to resort to meditation, reflection and spiritual practices, wellness programmes, fitness and sport experiences at work as a method of coping with stress and uncertainty at work.
- III. Industrial social workers should allow the spirituality tendencies in employees to see work as a calling because when work is seen as a calling, it becomes more meaningful and this will increase peaceful mind, productivity and commitment of employees.
- IV. Industrial social workers should advocate on behalf of employees that management should try to accommodate and encourage spiritual requests from employees. Organizations should encourage their employees to feel free to express their own spiritual beliefs. As long as the spiritual requests of some employees do not limit the freedom of others, managers should respond to them.
- V. Since workplace of today are more diverse and multicultural than ever before, such diversity should be acknowledged while absolute respect for individual differences should be followed. Since spirituality is a highly individual and idiosyncratic experience, it is necessary that spiritual practices be customized based on the principle of respecting and valuing individuals unique inner landscape, values and perspective.
- VI. Since the aim of any organization is to engage a whole person at work with all their minds, hearts, spirits and souls. It is important to acknowledge employees as spiritual beings. Management, Human resource personnel, social workers are therefore alerted to take into account employees spiritual lives and the value and richness of their collective potential. In the line of Leigh (1997), workplace spirituality start with the acknowledgement that employees do not bring only bodies and minds to work, but also their hearts, souls, creativity, talents and unique spirits.

Conclusion

In this 21st century when the world economy has been globalised, organizations are faced with more complexities, competition and structural changes which elicit the introduction of spirituality within the workplace so as to enable human hearts, spirits and souls to grow and flush so that employees and employers will become healthy, creative, innovative, compassionate and productive in all endeavours to be sustenance of the workplace.

Irrespective of whether or not, we allow ourselves to be consciously shaped by any explicit religious idea; we act in ways that leave us either healthy or unhealthy. What shapes our actions is our spirituality. Spirituality is concerned with how we construct a sense meaning and purpose in our lives. As seen spirituality has the potential to make a core contribution to human wellbeing, nourish human connections and enhance sense of community development within the workplace. In conclusion, it is when people work with a committed spirit that they can find a kind of meaning and purpose, a kind of fulfillment in the workplace and the employees' spiritual level will not only reduce stress, conflict, and absenteeism, but also enhance wellbeing, quality of life and work performance.

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