

Fostering Spirituality at Work Place

Dr. Anupriyo Mallick*

The human is considered to be the vital ingredient for the success of every business organization. He remains always on his toes to meet any unforeseeable risks in order to protect the organization. Presently, he enjoys the prime importance as he is the only player left with the corporates to have the winning stroke in this global cut throat competitive era. But then, in this process of winning the game and to be at the top he has to pay a very high price. Busy business schedules and round the clock winning approach turns him workaholic which in longer run might make him mentally and physically disable to perform his role, which in turn would result in to unproductive performance. This will increase the level of mental stress and negative interpersonal transactions, whereby, this intellectual asset will no longer be effective for the business players. The need is there at this crossroads to have revitalization of this live resource so as to regain the Power and Will through practicing the concepts of Spirituality.

“Spirituality is creeping into the office”, reported the June 1995 issue of Business Week; “...And companies are turning inward in search of a 'soul' as a way to foster creativity and to motivate leaders” Spirituality at work nourishes the inner life of the employees. There will be a sense of fulfilment experienced by the employees as they see their

work as a means to achieve a higher goal beyond material gain and a means to live out their values fully. There will be a sense of community in the organization and employees will feel that they are connected genuinely with each other. The fostering of spirituality at work calls for a holistic approach leveraging at the different sub-systems of the organization to maximize the effectiveness and sustainability of the various interventions. For example, relying on training alone to promote spirituality at work is unlikely to have any lasting impact on the organization if the organizational culture and reward systems are not aligned to support spiritual practices. Also, employees trained on spirituality will not be able to practice spirituality at the workplace if managers and supervisors adopt traditional methods of driving productivity and performance through emphasis on short-term goals and tight financial bottom-lines.

The word Spirituality is open to many interpretations. Some are relating it with God, while some consider it as a state of mental peace and happiness to detach oneself from the physical world. What ever may be the conclusion regarding the Spirituality, but one thing is crystal clear that it is a process to develop the sense of morality and ethics within yourself which is helpful to the human

* Professor of OB and HR, Eastern Institute for Integrated Learning in Management (EILM), Kolkata., e-mail: anupriyo_mallick@yahoo.com

being, to be stable and correct at the time of negative interpersonal transactions. There are four major goals of life: *Dharma, Artha, Kama & Moksha*. Dharma is creating sense of ethics in life. Artha is the tool to satisfy the desires of the life. Kama is the journey which the individual does in the life and Moksha is the Spiritual fulfillment of the life. Balance is necessary among these goals so as to enjoy successful business and personal life.

Some people believe that Spirituality is fad. But then what is wrong in that? Spirituality, being fad also provide better solutions to the business and personnel problems then such a fad is considered to be good and useful. This is why, the interest towards Spirituality is observed to be growing even though it is considered to be fad. See the Spirituality is fad or not is totally a relative phenomenon and thus it should not be the point of discussion.

In this era of 21st Century global cut throat competition the survival is only possible for those companies and businesses which are Spiritual besides professional. Thus today, Spirituality is the integral part of every business activity. Today the buzz words like TQM, MBO, and JIT etc. are being replaced by the word like *Ahm Brahmasmi* and *Tat Tvam Asi*.

Spirituality and Religion

Often it has been observed that Spirituality is mixed with the term Religion. But in actual condition there is a difference. Religion is basically the path leading towards the single essence of human life: Spirituality. Every religion has its own understanding regarding the nature of creation and Creator. This diversity provides people with different

avenues for realizing the one unified spiritual base which we share. According to Sri Sri Ravishankar Maharaj "a banana peel represents religion and the fruit inside is the spirituality."

Barriers to Spirituality at Work

Every organization has its own distinct culture that affect how its employees think, feel and behave. The organizational culture is reflected in the behavioral norms, artifacts, values, belief systems, and assumptions. The organizational culture provides a framework to guide the employee's day-to-day behavior and decision-making. It provides meaning and direction for employees to work towards the organizational goals. Organizational culture can create barriers to spirituality when it is characterized by a lack of a higher purpose beyond material success. For example, when the shared values and belief systems of the organization are based on the assumption that it exists to maximize profits, the whole organization will be steered towards material goals. There is little motivation for the members of the organization to act ethically. A highly profit-driven culture creates excessive competition among its employees and fosters an individualistic attitude. This is detrimental to spirituality as it destroys a sense of community in the workplace. Likewise, an over-emphasis on materialistic values in the organization culture will alienate the employees from their deeper longing to do something more meaningful than just creating material wealth.

The leadership of the organization plays an important role in shaping spirituality at work. Leaders can promote or stifle spirituality at work by their behavior since employees tend to view them as role models.

When leaders practice oppressive leadership styles with no regard to people's feelings and rely on externally imposed measures like rigid rules and regulations to drive behavior, it robs the dignity of employees and creates a stifling environment to work in. Employees will not experience a sense of inner peace working under such leadership and this undermines spiritual development. Likewise, when leaders act unethically, it will have a negative effect on spirituality at work. It sends a strong signal to employees and they would have to struggle with their conscience to make judgments on the appropriateness of the leaders' actions. People-related barriers to spirituality include self-centeredness, lack of an internal compass, conflicts, and office politics. In a way, all these barriers are inter-related and mutually reinforcing. When individuals in the organization are self-centred, they only consider their own needs and ignore others. This causes excessive conflicts and hinders the development of a sense of community in the organization. The internal compass guides an individual's outward behavior. A person without an internal compass will act in an unprincipled manner in response to external circumstances. Inevitably, this will bring out the worst in people and make the organization become very political. Excessive politics in the organization is not conducive to development in spirituality. It is unlikely for the members of the organization to experience inward peace when the organization is political.

The structure of the organization is reflected in the tasks, procedures, programs, reward systems, control systems, and communications systems. Structural barriers to spirituality at work include emphasis on

extrinsic motivation to appraise and reward employee performance, over reliance on technology and bureaucracy. When the appraisal and reward systems in the organization focus too much on extrinsic motivation, they condition employees to respond only to extrinsic motivators and reduce their need for intrinsic motivation. This is detrimental to spirituality. It conveys to employees that only material success and achievement matter in life and there is no need to strive for a higher purpose. Our experience tells us that there is an inverse relationship between technology and spirituality. Technology creates a sense of self-sufficiency and power. It reduces the need to connect and relate with some ultimate being beyond ourselves. Technology also reduces the human touch in the organization. People find it impersonal to work in a technologically advanced environment. In other words, technology can hinder community building and this is adverse to spirituality. Bureaucracy creates barriers to spirituality because it ignores the human side of the organization. Rigid rules and regulations stifle creativity and initiative in people. They dehumanize the organization. Humans do not function like programs in the computer. We do not act like passive agents in response to some impersonal instructions. We are proactive agents acting purposefully towards our goal.

Interventions

Managers have to decide on the most appropriate interventions to foster spirituality at work depending on the needs of the organization. Often, more than one type of intervention is required to effectively remove the barriers to spirituality from the sub-systems and make them more supportive of

spirituality. Cultural interventions work on the organizational culture. They aim to foster a supportive environment for the development of spirituality in the organization. Organizational culture is represented by the shared assumptions, values and belief systems. Since these are deeply embedded in the individuals of the organization, the organizational culture is most difficult to change. In practice, it requires the reinforcement of training and structural interventions to effect a change in the culture. It involves influencing the organizational culture by (a) identifying the actual norms of the organization; (b) defining the desired norms; (c) measuring the gap between actual and desired norms; (d) closing the “culture-gap” through group sanctions; and, (e) sustaining the cultural change effort through rewards. culture requires managers to first identify the actual norms in the organizations. For example, managers may find that the norm among the employees is to compromise on ethics due to bottom-line concerns. Next, the managers have to specify the desirable pro-spirituality norms. In this case, the managers will have to specify the desired ethical standards. The gap between actual and desired will give the management an idea of how much work needs to be done to move the organization toward its desired standard. The fourth step involves having the managers develop group consensus on how to move towards the desired standard and to decide what needs to be done to sanction those who violate the agreed course of actions. The last step completes the change effort by designing appropriate reward systems to sustain the change. Training interventions are directed at the people in the organization. The training programs are mostly designed to raise

awareness and competencies in integrating spirituality and work. They instruct participants on the spiritual basis to life and business. After attending the programs, participants are expected to feel uplifted and able to find meaning in their work. Other programs, like Yoga and Transcendental Meditation aim to teach participants how to tap into their inner spiritual resources, which are believed to be available in everyone. Training interventions can also be directed at the leadership. For example, leadership programs can be designed to train leaders in the organization to identify leadership practices and behaviors that are detrimental to the employees' spiritual development. Managers can also organize specific programs and events to promote awareness and practices of spirituality at the workplace. For example, managers can organize a “Spiritual Wellness Week” to promote awareness of spirituality issues at the workplace. Organizations can also invest in building library resource on spirituality at work.

A spiritually well person is one who feels that life is meaningful. He or she will find purpose in everything in life including his or her work. Organizations that support spirituality at work are those that have a larger purpose than just maximizing profits. These organizations believe in creating values to the community. They are not only accountable to the shareholders but also to many other stakeholders including the employees. Spiritual organizations are more attentive to their employees' spiritual needs. Hence, they will be more likely to design jobs that are meaningful for their employees and enable them to see how their work-lives are linked to a larger purpose. Another dimension of

spiritual wellness is intrinsic values. Spiritually well individuals are value-driven rather than money-driven. Likewise, organizations that emphasize spirituality at work are those that driven by a strong set of core values. An employee who does not subscribe to this value-system on community is unlikely to do well at the company. The company's core values affect the employees in two ways. First, individuals may self-select themselves to the company based on its core values. Second, they may align their value-systems to fit the company's core values.

Transcendence is the third dimension of spiritual wellness. Transcendence refers to having a transcendent perspective in life that believes in connecting with a higher being or creator of the universe. Individuals with a transcendent perspective will have a cosmic view of life and experience a sense of awe in thinking about life and the universe. Organizations that promote spirituality will convey to the employees the importance to having a broader and deeper perspective of life. The fourth dimension of spiritual wellness is community or a sense of connectedness with fellow human beings. This is definitely a highly desired outcome. As the society becomes more and more affluent, people tend to feel alienated and long for a sense of connectedness. Individuals working in organizations that promote spirituality at work will experience a sense of community. Spiritual organizations promote sharing and support among the members of the organization. Fostering spirituality at work is complex. Managers cannot hope to cultivate spirituality at work simply by relying on a single intervention like training or job design, etc. The single-intervention approach to

spirituality is able to only target one sub-system of the organization. To be effective and sustainable, we need multi-intervention approaches. Each intervention is designed to make changes at a specific sub-system of the organization. Collectively, the interventions complement and mutually reinforce each other. A holistic approach in fostering spirituality requires proper planning. There is no copycat approach or standard solution. In other words, managers cannot blindly adopt another company's program even though it has been proven to be successful. Managers have to conduct a thorough diagnosis of their organizational situation before deciding on the proper interventions. The proposed framework can serve as a good diagnostic tool. It guides the managers in analyzing the organization's readiness for and barriers to spirituality at each of the organizational sub-systems. For example, an organization may be ready for spirituality at work at the cultural level with its established corporate values and philosophy. However, the organization may be hampered by wrongly conceived reward systems that tend to be bottom-line oriented and which in turn lead to excessive competition among the employees. In this case, the needed intervention would be the realignment of the reward systems to make them oriented towards intrinsic values. The other intervention would be conflict management to foster a sense of community in the organization. An in-depth diagnosis of the organization's situation does not only enable the manager to decide on the kinds of interventions to adopt, it also gives suggestions on how to sequence these interventions. Using the previous example, the priority for the management will be redesigning the reward systems and team-

building. If these issues are not resolved, it will be a waste of resources to invest in training the employees or leadership on spirituality at work. In contrast, if an organization is not ready for spirituality due to its bottom-line oriented culture, the logical step is to engage in cultural interventions first to remove this cultural barrier to spirituality. Other training and structural interventions can follow. Otherwise, the training and restructuring efforts will not be supported by the organizational culture.

Since organizations exist as a system, all the sub-systems are interconnected. Any changes in any sub-system will affect the others. This means that we need to monitor the implementation process closely and make refinements accordingly to correct any unforeseen problems. Timely feedback is important to alert the managers to issues and

problems that have not been identified earlier in the overall change program. The proposed framework may seem simple. In reality it calls for tremendous management commitment to make it work. There is no quick fix solution to foster spirituality at work. Managers cannot expect to improve spirituality of the organization by paying lip services. They must be personally convicted and committed to the changes. Employees see their managers as role-models. If they perceive that their managers are not fully committed, they will be likewise. Management commitment is expressed in terms of time, resources and authority. Besides investing time and resources to diagnose, plan and implement the change strategies, managers need to empower their employees with the authority to take prompt and necessary actions to resolve any unforeseen problems.

Good ideas are not the monopoly of the educated

A lady bought some bathing soaps from a shop. When she opened one of the packets, she found that it was empty. There was no soap in there; it was just an empty wrapper! She lodged a complaint against the manufacturer and got her claim. That being settled, there was a task before the management of the soap factory. How had this happened? How could they ensure that the incident did not occur again? They had suffered enough bad publicity besides having to pay the compensation to the lady.

After a detailed investigation, it was discovered, that during the process of wrapping, it so happened that inevitably, one or two wrappers did get through, having no bar of soap in them! There was no way to make out the difference between a full wrapper and an empty one. The process of handling each one separately for this purpose seemed to be very cumbersome. So, the technical head was given the job of devising a method to overcome the problem. The man prepared a detailed report and proposed the setting up of a computer based system that would weigh and scan each bar, for the empty packs would not get detected by a normal x-ray machine. He proposed an expenditure of a large amount to put this system into place.

The management heard him out and passed the order to release the funds and to buy the machinery that he had proposed. An uneducated worker said, "Excuse me Sir, for my impertinence, but I have a solution that shall cost a fraction of what you are planning to go in for."

The management hesitated initially. But eventually they heard him out and agreed to try out his proposal. The next day, the worker brought a strong industrial fan. He put it at an angle near the conveyor belt on which the packed soap bars were coming through and switched it on. The few empty wrappers that came through got blown off by the fan! The rest of them went past easily.

A simple solution, for a complex problem! This goes to prove that ideas are not the monopoly of the educated.

Source : internet; received through : Dr A Jagan Mohan Reddy