The impact of spirituality on work performance

Habibollah Javanmard

Management Faculty, Islamic Azad University, Arak Branch, Iran
h-javanmard@iau-arak.ac.ir

Abstract

This paper focuses on the impact of spiritual leadership and spirituality at work for performance improvement. Based on literature survey, a conceptual model has been configured. Data was gathered using questionnaire from samples selected from the employees of Arak's Machinery Company which are 1849 persons including 52 managers, 178 supervisors, and 1619 other employees. Four hundred questionnaires were initially distributed and 259 usable data were obtained. The structural equation model was used for data analysis. Results show that the organizational vision affects meaningful work. Altruism affects employees' sense of community and meaningful work. Faith in work affects employees' sense, meaningful work and employees' inner life. Meaningful work of employees and employees' sense of community affects the work performance. Other hypotheses are not in support.

Keywords: Spiritual Leadership, Spirituality at Work, work performance.

Introduction

Historical evolution in theoretical and practical fields of management and organizational sciences has been affected by a powerful force which by proper orientation can lead to profound contribution not only in professional activities but also in all aspects of human life (Neal & Bennet, 2000). Although in recent decades it was deemed that this force is not congruent with business world, therefore it was discussed in informal literature (Mitroff & Denton, 1999). But now it is supported as a serious topic for academic and scientific research (O'Connell, 1999). This force had been so effective on principles of management and organization that some people described it as a fundamental transformation in management and organization field (Wagner-Marsh & Conley, 1999).

Despite all of the criticism and suspicions in its theory and practice, a growing interest in research on this subject among the academics, consultants and philosophers of management theory is evident as professional management organizations like Management Academy (2001) and International academy of Business Principles (2001) have officially supported research and study on this subject. This profound force is nothing but "spirituality", as implementing it in organizations will be the most important activity of the future management (Mitroff & Denton, 1999). This study explains the relationship between parameters of spiritual leadership and spiritual work and relationship between spiritual work and work unit performance parameters. Also by providing a model of spiritually at work, it introduces the literature of this concept to management and organization field in Iran and presents a new approach for organizational behavior discussions.

Spirituality

Most of contemporary writings talk about "spirituality", but they do not present a clear definition of it, therefore this word is used in distinct domains and given different definitions. A number of the definitions of spirituality are as follows:

In a definition it is cited "spirituality is a motivating power of life, an energy which inspires an individual to a particular ending or a self-transcendent purpose (McKnignt, 1984) . In other definition, spirituality is energy, meaning, purpose and awareness of life (Cavanagh, 1999). These definitions are mainly pointing at the inspiring energy or power which conducts people to a particular purpose. This inspiring power gives meaning and purpose to their life. According to these definitions, existence of spirituality in people's life is stimulant and surviving.

Myers (1990) defines spirituality in an article:"spirituality is the continuous search for meaning and purpose of life, awareness of profound value of life, extent of world, existing natural forces, and individual ethical system". Another definition consistent with this from Mitroff, management professor at South California University mentions that "spirituality is the passion to find meaning and purpose of life and to live on its basis" (Cavanagh, 1999). These two definitions emphasize on spirituality as the source of meaning and purpose in people's life. It means an endless search to understand the real meaning of life, its value and to achieve an identified conclusion.

In another more exact and comprehensive definition, spirituality is "an attempt to foster sensitivity towards oneself, others, beings other than human and god , or a challenge to find what is required to become human and a discovery for complete humanity" (Hinnells, 1995). It seems this definition is significant either theoretically or practically. It points at four dimensions of human communication which its existence is inevitable at least in one dimension at a moment. Furthermore, it offers effort to nurture the sensitivity to establish four types of effective communication to achieve complete humanity.

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H.Javanmard
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Spiritual leadership

Spiritual leadership is a causal leadership theory for organizational transformation designed to create an intrinsically motivated, learning organization. The theory of spiritual leadership is developed within an intrinsic motivation model that incorporates vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love, theories of workplace spirituality, and spiritual survival (Fry,2005).

Operationally, spiritual leadership comprises values, attitudes and behaviors that are necessary to intrinsically motivate one's self and others so they have a sense of spiritual survival through calling and membership this entails (Fry, 2003): a)Creating a vision wherein leaders and followers experience a sense of calling in that life meaning and makes a difference. b) Establishing a social/organizational culture based on the values of altruistic live whereby leaders and followers have a sense of membership, feel understood and appreciated, and have genuine care, concern, and appreciation for both self and others.

In fact, spiritual leader makes people love their job through raising sensitivity of organizations members to one's self, others and metaphysics, then motivates them on their organizational tasks, thus provides their spiritual survival (Sheep, 2004).

Spiritual leadership theory (SLT) is a causal organizational transformation theory to build a learning organization which is intrinsically motivated. In consistent with transformational leadership theory, this theory (SLT) coordinates leaders' abilities to mobilize followers' capabilities in today's changing environment, and considers leadership from a fresh view. The theory of spiritual leadership is developed within an intrinsic motivation model that incorporates vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love, theories of workplace spirituality, and spiritual survival. The purpose of spiritual leadership is to tap into

The fundamental needs of both leader and follower for spiritual survival through calling and membership, to create vision and value congruence across the individual, empowered team, and organization levels and, ultimately, to foster higher levels of organizational commitment and productivity (Fry, 2003, p.699).

Organizational Vision

Study shows that spiritual leaders must have vision, and while moving toward vision they perform following acts (Bishop, 2006): a).They respect the existing reality. b).They provide context to accomplish the vision. c). Spiritual leaders harmonize everything to accomplish the vision. In fact, spiritual leaders with their unique characteristics envision the future of the organization and influence on the employees in a way they believe in organization's vision and become hopeful of organization's future. Thus, leaders enhance employees' intrinsic motivation for more effort (Nargesian, 2008).

Altruism

Spiritual leader cultivates altruism culture inside the organization which causes people to become aware of their selves deeply and establish desired relations with others. This causes establishment of communication networks between people and attention of leaders to the requirements and interests of employees, ultimately, their growth and development to a level they can be held responsible and authorized (Nargesian, 2008).

Faith in work

Spiritual leadership in organization causes the establishment of spiritual beliefs and faith in work in employees and this, as an intrinsic motivator for employees, makes them develop their abilities and, consequently, increase their responsibility (Nargesian, 2008).

Spirituality at work

Most definitions of workplace spirituality include the notions of meaning, purpose and being connected to othersn(Mirvis, 1997; Conger, 1994; Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Vaill, 1998, 2000; Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003). Vaill (2000), for example, views spirituality as having to do with human kind's search for meaning, and argues that the search for meaning for many adults has often led people to seek significance in their work (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003). Definition of "spirituality at work" is difficult eventhough its application in organization is undeniable. Therefore, we proceed with various and possibly distinct definitions:

a) Spirituality at work includes a concept of integrity and solidarity in work and understanding the profound values in work (Gibbons, 2001). b).Spirituality at work consists of an attempt to search and find the ultimate meaning of life for work life, to communicate between individuals and their colleagues, and other people who somehow contribute to the work, also, harmony or unity between individuals' fundamental believes with their organizations' values (Mitroff & Denton, 1999). c) Spirituality at work is an inspiring and motivating energy for a continuous search to find purpose and meaning in work life, profound understanding of work value, life, extent of world, natural environment beings and personal belief systems (Myers, 1999). d). Spirit at work is a distinct experience characterized by cognitive features, interpersonal dimensions, spiritual presence, and mystical components (Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2004). e). Spirituality at work is the recognition that employees have an inner life that nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work that takes place in context of community (Ashmos & Duchon, 2005).

The latest definition is used in this study which sees spirituality at work as having three components: the inner life, meaningful work, and community. These three components are propositions of spirituality at work in which inner life, meaningful work and community relate to human self-concept, work content and working context respectively (Dehler, 2003).

Inner life

Spirituality is a comprehensive and common phenomenon which is stacked in part of human nature. Spirituality is part of intrinsic nature of human that can be found in all mankind. This innate phenomenon thrives in some people and yet it hides in others. In fact, its intensity differs from person to person. When someone enters the workplace with a specific ethical system, his/her experience of that job forms on that ethical system. In other words, there is a spiritual background in everyone on a basis of their own internal nature (Rastgar, 2006).

The notion of inner life is related to individual identity which Shamir's self-concept theory helps explain, and also to social identity which occurs through group membership–in this case in a work unit or organization. That is, individuals require a larger social context or group in order to completely understand and express themselves. For example, Ellemers, de Gilder, & Haslam (2004) argue that employees who identify with their work unit can be energized when circumstances enhance the salience of common identity. Thus, a work unit that enables one's spiritual identity can energize the group.Further, others have suggested that belonging to a social group, i.e., to an organization, shapes one's self-concept (Duchon, 2005).

Individuals' identities are formed in part by how they believe others view the work unit or organization to which they belong (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). But an individual's social identity at work likely is not derived just from the organization but, as Ashforth & Mael (1989) point out, the subunit where one works everyday may be an even more powerful determinate of social identity than the larger organization. The argument is that an individual's self-concept is shaped by the knowledge that he/she is part of a work unit. Fry (2003) refers to this in a theory of spiritual leadership as membership (Duchon, 2005).

Meaningful work

The meaningful work component of workplace spirituality has some roots in the job design literature although as we use it here goes beyond the notions associated with the job design literature. Job design has been defined as the "manipulation of the content, functions, and relationships of jobs to accomplish organizational purposes and satisfy the needs of job holders" (Duchon, 2005). If work content can provide people with positive spiritual experience, it will result in spiritual development. In individuals' point of view, their work will become lovable and compassionate and what previously was boring will seem as a magical tool for growth, enhancement and fostering their working life. In this situation, individuals have good feelings of positivity and effectiveness. They feel effective and this feeling of effectiveness brings joy and peace in work and the feeling of well-being. In other words, content of work can positively develop spirituality in workplace (Rasgar, 2006).

A conceptualization of spirituality at work must include, not only the recognition that individuals have inner lives that push them towards a search for meaning, but that part of the search for meaning is satisfied by meaningful work. This idea is raised in Mirvis' question: "What are organizations doing today to help people meet their meaning needs in the workplace?" (Duchon , 2005). We draw on the job design literature to ground the notion of meaningful work but go beyond the job design/job enrichment focus on meaningful tasks and jobs. Meaningful work is about cognitively meaningful tasks but it is also about work that creates a sense of joy (Wrzesniewski, 2003), which connects workers to a larger good and to things viewed by the worker as important in life (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003).

Community

Interpersonal experience is based on the need which everyone feels to achieve organizational and common goals in workplace. This association with others, frequently, combines with a common sense which presents reliability, respect and even love. Experience of spirituality at work causes dependency between individuals from which a new success comes. They become part of something bigger than sum of their individual beings; therefore they need each other to succeed. This unity for a common purpose brings a spirit of solidarity. Where people work together with solidarity, existence of a work community provides a suitable ground for development of spirituality at work (Rastegar, 2006).

Past studies

It seems most of past studies as (Cavanagh,1999,) concluded by reviewing more than 350 studies and articles in past two decades discuss following subjects: Spirituality, enhancement and organizational transformation, spirituality and leadership in organization, spirituality and organization life cycle , spirituality and work problems , spirituality and employees' mental hygiene , spirituality and competitive advantage , spirituality and organizational performance , spirituality and organizational culture , spirituality and meaningful work .
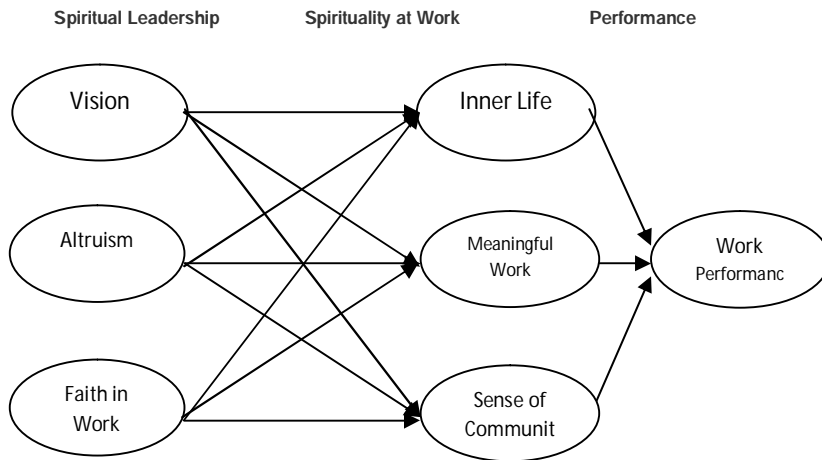
Conceptual model

The definition of Fry (2003) on spiritual leadership represents the leadership component and the definition of Ashmos & Duchon (2000) on workplace spirituality represents the work unit spirituality construct. The model of Fry (2003) argues that work place spirituality is positively associated with leaders who possess and exhibit the values, attitudes, and behaviors of spiritual leadership. Duchon & Ashmos (2005) in their mode argued spiritual leadership will shape a work unit that recognizes employees having an inner life and enables these employees to participate in meaningful work that takes place in the context of community. They believed that these variables lead to enhanced work unit performance and also they suggest featuring researchers

that implementing them mode so in this paper we introduced a conceptual model in Fig. 1 and implemented in Islamic work environment.

Fig. 1. Conceptual model

Conceptual model of this research is derived from the study of Denis Duchon and Don Ashmos Plowman (2005) and its survey in Machinery Arak Company. This model has three types of variable. Variable of leadership include organizational vision, altruism and faith to work. Variables of spirituality include inner life, meaningful work and community. Variable of organizational output is performance. The independent variables are organizational vision, altruism and faith. Each of these variables is related to inner life, meaningful work and community as dependent variables. The three dependent variables are related to output variable of performance.

Research objectives

Ultimate goal: conducting a study which its result helps improve and enhance the performance of employees.

Main goal: provision and explanation of a conceptual model of spirituality at work

Objectives:

a). Entering spirituality's literature to Iranian academic atmosphere because of its high importance in present era according to the increasing attention in western scientific atmosphere. b). Provision of a quantitative measure for organizational spirituality to enable the conversion of theoretical studies to practical behavioral activities. c). Testing the conceptual model of spirituality at Machinery Arak Company as a case study and expanding it to the other organizations if successful. d). Introducing a new approach to organizational behavior science which can be the first steps for further discussion in this field.

Hypothesis

- Organizational vision affects employees' sense of community.
- Organizational vision affects employees' meaningful work.
- Organizational vision affects employees' inner life.
- Altruism affects employees' sense of community.

- Altruism affects employees' meaningful work.
- Altruism affects employees' inner life
  - Faith in work affects sense of community.
  - Faith in work affects employees' meaningful work.
  - Faith in work affects employees' inner life.
  - Sense of community affects employees' work performance.
  - Meaningful work affects employees' work performance.
  - Inner life affects employees' work performance.

Method

This study is a descriptive field study. Method of data collection is a questionnaire of 40 questions based on the model of Dennis Duchon and Don Ashmos Plowman spirituality at work measurement (Ashmos, 2005) and Fry's leadership survey questionnaire (Fry, 2005) and Arak's Machinery work performance questionnaire. Vision variables has two questions , altruism has 6 questions , faith has two questions , sense of community has 6 question , meaningful work has 7 questions , inner life has 5 questions , work performance has 12 questions , separately . Also for multiple choice answers Lickert spectrum has been used.

To validate the questionnaire, 30 questionnaires were distributed and data were collected. Instrument reliability was tested using α technique and all values ranged from 0.717 to 0.882 for the items these values has showed in table 1 and show the reliability of the questionnaire is Supportable.

Table 1. The questionnaire reliability

Variables	Questions	α
Vision	3	0.812
Altruism	6	0.810
Faith	2	0.882
Sense of community	6	0.717
Meaningful work	7	0.783
Inner life	5	0.756
Performance	12	0.795

Samples of this study selected from the employees of Arak's Machinery Company which are 1849 persons including 52 managers, 178 supervisors, and 1619 other employees. Four hundred questionnaires were initially distributed and 298 usable data were obtained after discarding 39 questionnaires due to incompleteness of the responses. Two hundred and fifty nine usable data were obtained from the company. Sample demographic characteristics have showed in Table 2.

Analysis

After data collection using descriptive statistics, the relating indicators with parameters of this study is shown in tables. In this study, structural equations and LISREL software version 8.5 and factorial approval method is used for analysis of data. LISREL or structural equation

modeling is a powerful multivariable analysis technique of multivariable regression family. Accurately, it is expansion of a general linear model which helps researcher test regression models at the same time.

Table 2. Sample demographics

		Frequency	%
Gender	Male	210	81
	Female	49	19
Marriage	Married	218	84
	Single	41	16
Age	20-30	65	25.1
	31-40	114	44
	41-50	77	29.7
	51+	3	1.2
Education	High school	10	3.8
	graduate	23	8.8
	Associate degree	78	30.1
	Bachelor's degree	125	48.2
	Master's degree	21	8.1
	Doctorate degree	2	0.7
Service duration (year)	1-5	47	18.1
	6-10	64	24.7
	11-15	33	12.7
	16-20	45	17.3
	20+	70	27
Employment status	Permanent	135	52
	Contract	124	48
Organizational status	Manager	24	9.2
	Staff	53	20.4
	Skill workers	62	23.9
	Simple workers	120	46.3

Assessment of Model Fit

The overall fit of the saturated measurement model is good. With LISREL, the model yielded a chi-square of 1557 with 725 df. Although analysis of covariance structure has traditionally relied on a chi-square likelihood ratio test to assess model fit, it is very sensitive to the sample size, number of items, and number of factors in the model. Therefore, other fit indices, including chi-square / df, GFI, NFI, and RMSEA, were used to assess overall model fit. The value of chi-square / df was found to be 2.147, which is a good fit because the recommended range for the ratio of chi-square to degrees of freedom is between 1.0 and 3.0 (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1995). The GFI assesses the correspondence between observed and hypothesized covariance. A good GFI should be 0.90 or higher, and a good AGFI should be near 0.90 or higher. In our model, GFI is 0.877, and AGFI is 0.857. The NFI indicates the extent to which the model improves fit compared to a random model, and a value greater than 0.80 is considered indicative of good fit. Our model has an NFI of 0.872 and therefore shows a good fit. The RMSEA value of 0.06 is well below 0.1, indicating a low discrepancy between the implied covariance in the model and observed covariance in the data.

Structural equations of spirituality at work model

According conceptual model, the structural equations provided by LISREL software are presented results in table 3 and the theoretical path model illustrated in Fig. 1. Six out of eight relationships were statistically significant at conventional levels ($p < 0.05$).

Hypothesis with t-value greater than 1.96 is supported, and with t-value between -1.96 and 1.96 is not supported, confidence interval of test is 95% significance level.

Results

Organizational vision has no effect on employees' sense of community. It seems the organizational vision does not motivate employees to communicate more with each other. Obviously, this is a result of individual work rather than team work.

Organizational vision affects meaningful work of employees. In other words, organizational vision makes people work with more joy and enthusiasm. It means organizational vision creates a higher value of work content. Organizational vision does not affect employees' inner life. The inner existence of people is not affected by organizational vision. It means the inner existence of people is not affected by a good or bad organizational vision. Altruism affects employees' sense of community. Nevertheless, the sense of loving another one which is derived from loving one's own self makes people communicate more with each other. Altruism affects employees' meaningful work. Loving another one makes people work with more joy and enthusiasm. Altruism has no effect on employees' inner life. It seems this may be a result of histrionic love for others which has no effect on inner existence of people.

Faith in work affects employees' sense of community. When some

Table 3. Analyses of the model and hypothesis

	Hypothesis	Path Correlation	t-value	Result
1	Organizational vision affects employees' sense of community.	0.15	1.79	Not support
2	Organizational vision affects employees' inner life.	0.23	2.38	Support
3	Organizational vision affects employees' meaningful work.	0.21	1.81	Not support
4	Altruism affects employees' sense of community.	0.24	4.01	Support
5	Altruism affects employees' meaningful work.	0.20	3.11	Support
6	Altruism affects employees' inner life	-0.048	-0.63	Not support
7	Faith in work affects sense of community.	0.29	3.89	Support
8	Faith in work affects employees' meaningful work.	0.28	3.43	Support
9	Faith in work affects employees' inner life.	0.36	3.48	Support
10	Sense of community affects employees' work performance.	0.049	0.78	Not support
11	Meaningful work affects employees' work performance.	0.18	3.61	Support
12	Inner life affects employees' work performance.	0.36	5.41	Support

people do their jobs with faith it makes them communicate better with others in order to do jobs better. This increases individual's sense of community. Faith in work affects employees' meaningful work. In other words, working with faith and belief makes people feel what they are doing has a meaning and purpose, thus they work joyfully and enthusiastically. Faith in work affects employees' inner life. Working with faith makes inner existence of people flourish and people feel that they are fostering their inner values. Sense of community has no effect on employees' work performance. In other words, team work does not affect work performance. This shows employees tend to their jobs individually rather than in a group or team. Meaningful work of employees affects their work performance. By enriching work content employees enjoy their job, thus it has a positive effect on their work performance. Inner life of employees affects their work performance. Inner existence of people makes them do their jobs better and show better performance.

Conclusion and suggestion

In organizations, spirituality at work points to some kind of organizational culture which is obtained from organization's mission statement, leadership and business, and has a social value which makes organization flourish and employees develop spiritually. From individual perspective, spirituality mentions that employees should have a meaningful work and life, and there should be a path for them to reach their ultimate values, and use their creativity, feelings and intelligence along with their physical and logical capabilities, and experience other aspects of life. At last, the conceptual model of spiritual work which is examined in this study includes constant variables, but the relations between variables can be defined differently and their effects on each other can be explored. Therefore, it is suggestive that researchers identify other relations between these variables in future studies.

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