

Workplace Spirituality and Human Resource Practices in Thailand

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Abstract. *The objectives of this qualitative research with a grounded theory approach are to investigate the process of workplace spirituality practices; to study the human resource practices in the organization; and to study the workplace spirituality benefits. The researcher selected 28 employees from “Company A” as the participants for this study. Interview data, audio visual and document reviews were integrated to answer the research questions. Based on manual coding, three main themes emerged, which are “Workplace spirituality Practices”, “Human Resource Practices”, and “Workplace Spirituality Benefits”. In conclusion, the research reported in this article makes a significant contribution to our knowledge about the importance of workplace spirituality practices and human resource practices in Thai organization.*

Keywords: workplace spirituality, workplace spirituality practices, workplace spirituality benefits, human resource, human resource practices, human resource management, human resource development

Introduction

During the last two decades, interest in the field of workplace spirituality has continued to grow among practitioners and scholars, with several special editions of journals being dedicated to the topic. The growing number of scholarly publications, university research centers, courses, academic conferences on workplace spirituality suggested that workplace spirituality has emerged as a sustainable new field that is worthy of further research (Miller, 2007).

Today, more people are finding inspiration and fulfillment in their jobs by bringing their spirituality into the workplace. An awareness of workplace spirituality can help one better understand employee work behavior in the 21st century. Organizations that promote a workplace spirituality culture recognize that employees have both a mind and a spirit, seek to find meaning and purpose in their work, and desire to connect with other employees and be part of a community (Rao, 2010).

Workplace spirituality has been recognized as a fundamental area of research in the academic world to add more meaning to one’s workplace. If the employees are allowed to bring their spiritual attributes to the workplace, they will become more fulfilled but if the employees work in a dispirited workplace, they will manifest themselves in various work troubles like low morale, high turnover, and non-committed attitude to the organization (Petchsawang & Duchon, 2009).

Several studies show that in organizations that have introduced spirituality into the workplace have witnessed that it improved productivity, greater employee satisfaction and increased organizational commitment (Rao, 2010). Workplace spirituality also impacts

overall employee as well as organizational outcomes and practices (Deshpande, 2012). The practical importance of workplace spirituality for improving health conditions by providing a healthy atmosphere and meaningful work for employees (Kumar & Kumar, 2014).

Ironically, introducing spirituality into the organizations is nothing new for HR. In actuality, many of the areas that HR addresses, and has done so for many years. There are many of the same things that support spirituality, For instance matters such as work life balances, proper selection of employees, setting performance goals and rewarding people for the work they do are all components of making the organization more spiritual. In fact as you review the characteristics of a spiritual organization, in every case, HR is either the leader in making such things happen, or is the vehicle by which the organization helps employees understand their responsibilities and offers the requisite training to make things happen. In the end, it's HR that will make the workplace a supportive work environment, where communication abounds and employees feel free to express themselves (Rao, 2010). Ajala (2013) recommended that Management, HR 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.

Research Objective

The objectives of this study are to investigate the process of workplace spirituality practices; to study the human resource practices in the organization; and to study the benefits of workplace spirituality practices in the organization.

Research Questions

1. What are the workplace spirituality practices in the organization?
2. What are the human resource practices in the organization?
3. What are the benefits of workplace spirituality practices in the organization?

Literature Review

The Concept of Workplace Spirituality in an Organization

Several scholars have provided definitions for or identified components of workplace spirituality. Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2010) proposed a definition of workplace spirituality as an aspect of the workplace, either in the individual, the group, or the organization, that promotes individual feelings of satisfaction through transcendence. To elaborate, that the process of work facilitates employees' sense of being connected to a non-physical force beyond themselves that provides feelings of completeness and joy.

Ashmos and Duchon (2000) defined a workplace spirituality as one that enables the individual's expression of an inner life by performing meaningful work in the context of a community. Moreover, Smith and Rayment (2007) identified a definition of workplace spirituality as "individuals and organizations seeing work as a spiritual path, as an opportunity to grow and to contribute to society in a meaningful way. It is about care, compassion and support of others, about integrity and people being true to themselves and others. It means individuals and organizations attempting to live their values more fully in the work they do". Petchsawang and Duchon (2012) indicated that workplace spirituality is not a fringe idea. In fact, workplace spirituality addresses human activities relating to personal development, compassion, meaningfulness and joy at work, honesty, trust, job commitment, and wellbeing of employees.

Workplace Spirituality Benefits

Karakas (2010) suggested three different perspectives on how workplace spirituality benefits employees and supports organizational performance based on the extant literature as, enhances employee well-being and quality of life, provides employees a sense of purpose and meaning at work, provides employees a sense of interconnectedness and community. Several scholars contend that workplace spirituality can lead to better functioning employees, in terms of their overall contribution to the work organization, to higher productivity, better decision making, and increased problem solving capabilities and overall more efficient use of material and human resources (Cash, Gray, & Roods, 2000; Guillory, 2000; Karakas, 2010; Krishnakumar & Neck, 2002).

According to Campuzano and Seteroff (2010), they explained that workplace spirituality can promote employee success, lead to self-actualization and employee satisfaction, the values of honesty, trust, respect, responsibility, and integrity. Also, research is demonstrating a positive relationship between the presence of workplace spirituality, employee wellness, decreased absenteeism and turnover (Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2008). Workplace spirituality also impacts overall employee as well as organizational outcomes and practices (Deshpande, 2012).

The Concept of Human Resource Management (HRM)

HRM can be defined as the effective selection and utilization of employees to best achieve the goals and strategies of an organization, as well as the goals and needs of employees. An important point to stress is that the responsibility for HRM is (or, at least, should be) shared by HR specialists and line management (DeSimone & Werner, 2012). Armstrong (2006) said that HRM is defined as a strategic and coherent approach to the management of an organization's most valued assets – the people working there who individually and collectively contribute to the achievement of its objectives. Similarly, Byars and Rue (2006) stated that HRM is defined as a system of activities and strategies that focus on successfully managing employees at all levels of an organization to achieve organization goals. The overall purpose of HRM is to ensure that the organization is able to achieve success through people. DeSimone and Werner (2012) suggested that HRM can be divided into primary and secondary functions. Primary functions are directly involved with obtaining, maintaining, and developing employees. Secondary functions either provide support for general management activities or are involved in determining or changing the structure of the organization.

The Concept of Human Resource Development (HRD)

DeSimone and Werner (2002) defined HRD as a set of systematic and planned activities designed by an organization to provide its members with the opportunities to learn the necessary skills to meet current and future job demands. They also stated that HRD can be a stand-alone function, or it can be one of the primary functions within the HRM department (DeSimone & Werner, 2012). McLagan (1989) also identified that HRD is an integrated use of training and development, career development, and organization development to improve individual and organizational effectiveness. As well as, Swanson and Holton (2009) also defined HRD as a process of developing and unleashing expertise for the purpose of improving organizational systems, work processes, and team and individual performances. The concept of HRD deals with many facets of development of individuals including their physical, intellectual, emotional, political, and spiritual aspects. Kumar (2005) expressed



that HRD is not only training for operational skills but also includes behavioral skills as it ultimately aims to create an enabling culture wherein the capabilities are acquired, sharpened and used. The purposes of HRD are said to influence the nature and extent of HRD activities being implemented (McLean & McLean, 2001). HRD is centered on learning and performance perspectives, both benefiting the individual and the interests of shareholders.

Research Design

A qualitative research approach was considered the most effective one for this study.

The researcher employed grounded theory as the research strategy. Grounded theory is a set of iterative techniques designed to identify categories and concepts within text that are linked into formal theoretical models (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Charmaz (2006, p. 2) described grounded theory as a set of methods that consists of systematic, flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories grounded in the data themselves. Grounded theories offer something beyond a descriptive response to the question “What’s going on here?” by providing a systematic explanation for both why and how it does go on (Locke, Silverman, & Spirduso, 2010, p. 192).

The constructivist grounded theory of Charmaz (2006) was best suited for this research, because it is a more flexible approach, which recognizes the interaction between the researcher and the participants is in order to understand the meaning of the experiences shared during the research process (Charmaz, 2000). “The constructivist grounded theory approach assumes that data and theories are neither emergent nor discovered but rather are constructed by both the researcher and the research participant” (Allen, 2010; Charmaz, 2006). This approach does not study a single process nor core category as in the systematic procedure of Strauss and Corbin’s approach. The constructivist grounded theory also is best suited to my research question which explores the complexities of the workplace spirituality concept and the meanings the participants assign to these issues which are framed within the context of their own lives.

Data Collection

Data collection methods in this study were in-depth interviews, audio visual and document reviews. The participants were selected by using purposive and theoretical sampling. The number of participants depended on data collection until saturation was reached. Theoretical saturation occurs in data collection when, no or little new information is being extracted from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 212). The researcher selected 28 employees from “Company A”, as the participants for this study.

Data Analysis

There were three cycles coding as: **First cycle coding method**. When the data were extracted from the interview transcripts, the coding and formatting made it more convenient and easier to revise. The number for each line was assigned to allow a preliminary analysis of the data. The researcher used a pencil portrait of Initial Coding, and then needed to read and re-read the raw data. **Second cycle coding method**. Began with manual coding line by line. Then, classified and grouped the open codes. **Third cycle coding method**. The researcher then displayed and made reductions. Then, withdrawing and making a conclusion (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Finally, there were only three main themes emerged in this study:

(1) Workplace Spirituality Practices, (2) Human resource Practices, and (3) Workplace Spirituality Benefits

Discussion

Response to Research question one: “what are the workplace spirituality practices in the organization?” In responding to this research question, “*Workplace Spirituality Practices*” at “Company A” started by the president and top management of the organization. They have a larger vision than the typical revenue only by elaborating the real meaning of the organization, to incorporate the concept of a social institution with full potential to planting a new seed of virtue for the nation. The company has helped employees not only by making wishes or desires to do good deeds but also taking active participation with the president, the top management, and staff members in various activities during and after work. The arrangement to develop an institutional environment was made in the same direction to establish a sustainable organizational culture. The president and the top management encouraged all supervisors to attend workplace spirituality activities first in order that the supervisors would be good role models for their subordinates.

This result is consistent with Charoenarpornwattana, Sakulkoo & Tubsree (2015) who said that the process of developing workplace spirituality practices started when the president and the top executives realized the importance of workplace spirituality and assigning all employees to attend workplace spirituality activities. A number of scholars emphasize that workplace spirituality developed leaders are extra effective (Strack and Fotler., 2002; Fry, 2003; and Fry et al., 2005). Khanifar et al. (2010) also suggested that managers should help the members of their organizations to figure how efficient they are for their organizations to reach determined goals. Leaders must articulate how their organization’s work is beyond economic purposes and serves a larger social purpose. This articulation of transcendence will help the employee know how he or she is instrumental in the organization and how his or her work supports that social purpose (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz 2010).

Moreover, the company had an idea to create a brotherhood among its employees and to encourage them to work with an attitude towards the company as more than a workplace. The company also can be well aware of the importance of work life quality, including mental well-being, right beliefs and positive thinking. These results are consistent with Pongsabutr (2009), who stated that the company’s motives for incorporating workplace spirituality practices into the organization were the needs to develop employees to be good, happy, mindful, concentrate at work, and to be able to control their emotions, patience, morality and ethical behaviors such as honesty and responsibility. There were benefits to employees, which would contribute to the company’s growth and give a good effect to the surrounding society of employees themselves as to their friends, family members, and the nation as a whole.

As well as, Charoenarpornwattana (2015), summarized that the company developed workplace spirituality practices with emphasis on development of all employees to be good people, by following in the King’s footsteps, inculcating the employees to have discipline, harmony, sacrifice, virtue, and gratitude. The company also can be well aware of the importance of work life quality, including mental well-being, right beliefs and positive thinking. Moreover, McGhee & Grant (2008, p. 65) extrapolated a multitude of core values of workplace spirituality identified by different authors on the subject; namely, equality, honesty, compassion, service, duty, trustworthiness, being a good citizen, empathy, integrity,



humanism, responsibility, humility, empathy, service to others, respect, openness, caring and concern, and reflective practice.

Response to Research question Two: “what are the human resource practices in the organization?” In responding to this research question, it was found that “**Human Resource Practices**” started from a change in the management’s outlook, from asking how to make employees love the company, and how to make the company loved and admired by the employees. The company started to pay attention to the development of intra-company relationships, in parallel with restructuring and improvement of work methods.

This result is consistent Karakas (2010), who stated that workplace spirituality had benefited participants in all aspects of their personal and professional lives and it should be implemented as a tool for HR of the organization. Workplace spirituality enhances employee well-being and quality of life; provides employees a sense of purpose and meaning at work; provides employees a sense of interconnectedness and community. These perspectives can provide HR practitioners and managers new ways to develop new HR approaches incorporating workplace spirituality. Similarly, Ishrat (2013) pointed out that employees, who enjoy good working relationships, receive proactive career development, feel valued by the organization and well treated in times of change, are likely to be contributing the most to a business. There has been a dramatic increase in the number of consultants, trainers, coaches, and other HR professionals focused on introducing workplace spirituality (McKee, Mills and Driscoll, 2008).

However, the study results found significant casual relationships between organization development (OD) and workplace spirituality. Ashforth and Pratt (2010) believed that the exclusion of spirituality in the workplace is due largely to the historical OD. Again, French and Bell (2001) suggested that workplace spirituality; also occupies a special place in OD efforts. Adding to this, a very recent paper has shown clear linkages of workplace spirituality with leadership and OD (Pawar, 2008). Similarly, Duchon and Plowman (2005) noted that employee experiences of workplace spirituality are positively associated with work unit performance. These views suggest a relationship between the organizational effectiveness aspect of OD and workplace spirituality.

Response to Research question Three: “What are the benefits of workplace spirituality practices in the organization?” In responding to this research question, “**Workplace Spirituality Benefits**” at “Company A” could summarized that after having participated in workplace spirituality activities, the employees had better changes in their mental and emotional stability, moral strength, ethical values and caring, leading to better relationships with their co-workers. The company is well aware of the work life quality of employees. This leads, they believe, to love in the organization, with full devotion and development.

These results are consistent with Rego & Cunha (2007) who stated that a critical dimension of workplace spirituality association with coworkers is known as a sense of community, which reinforces the connections and bonds between staff members and their associates (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). Fry and Slocum (2008) argued that workplace spirituality can produce positive outcomes for better health and psychological well-being of employees. As supported by Karakas (2010), who said that workplace spirituality enhances the employee’s quality of life and well-being. Workplace spirituality generally has a positive impact on job satisfaction (Altaf & Awan, 2011; Bodia & Ali, 2012). In addition, workplace spirituality enhances employees’ morale, commitment and productivity due to the reduction in stress and burnout (Ajala, 2013; Miller et al. 2012; Chand & Koul, 2012).

The results also show that after participating in workplace spirituality activities, the employees had higher productivity, increased output, reduced time and wastages, lower absenteeism, lower turnover rates, more focus in their work, which will ultimately lead to increased organizational performance, and financial success. One of the primary benefits of workplace spirituality is that people are more in touch with the source of creativity. Positive interaction between employer and employees is crucial to the success of workplace spirituality practices. When the atmosphere is good and work assignment is inspiring, the productivity can be dynamic. It enhances skills among employees (Meena, 2013). Workplace spirituality also contributes to increased organization performance (Ayranci, 2011; Maleki et al., 2012; Malik et al., 2011; Jason & Sudha, 2014) which has many positive advantages for organizations (Rastgar, Zarei, Davoudi, Fartash, 2012).

Recommendations for Further Research

The findings of this study indicate that workplace spirituality practices and human resource practices, including human resource management (HRM), and human resource development (HRD), are the important component for organization. There are more benefits from developing workplace spirituality practices and human resource practices in the organization. The employees had better changes in their mental and emotional stability, moral strength, ethical values and caring, leading to better relationships with their co-workers, higher productivity, increased output, reduced time and wastages, lower absenteeism, lower turnover rates, more focus in their work, which will ultimately lead to increased organizational performance, and financial success. The researcher believes that workplace spirituality practices may need to study for more research with the different context.

Conclusions

The results of this study support the relevant workplace spirituality concepts. The results indicated the importance of workplace spirituality practices and the workplace spirituality benefits. The researcher found that to make any workplace more compelling, HRM should be developed together with HRD. Moreover, the study results found significant casual relationships between organization development (OD) and workplace spirituality. It is hoped that the conclusions of this study can be used as groundwork for future studies about the practice of workplace spirituality practices in Thailand.

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