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Workplace Spirituality: A Study in an Indian Pharmaceutical Organization

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A STUDY IN AN INDIAN
PHARMACEUTICAL ORGANIZATION

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ABSTRACT

The ever more prevalent forces of global competition, downsizing, and reengineering are increasing the levels of uncertainty in many aspects of people's realities, and have generated a workforce who seek value, support, and meaning in their lives. With diverse workforce the question of managing employees with various religious beliefs and spirituality practices at workplace is being seriously considered in corporate world. This study defines spirituality and religion from the perspective of the workplace and documents the increasing importance of this phenomenon. The objective of the study is to explore the importance of spirituality, religion and the emerging trends of the recent past; and then connect the same with the organizations in Indian context. The study was conducted in a pharmaceutical organization with HR managers and shop floor workers perspective on the topic. Focus group discussion was conducted amongst shop floor workers to understand their point of views whereas a questionnaire was designed for HR managers to gauge their views. Workplace and religious spiritual practices of certain multinational organization were studied through personal interviews and questionnaire. The discussion and analysis in this paper indicate that religion and spirituality has a great impact on people's values, attitudes and behaviour at workplace. An understanding of these concepts allows managers to understand why accommodations are necessary to avoid conflict.

Keywords:Workplace Spirituality, Religious Practices, Worksite

INTRODUCTION

The study is an employee engagement research in a pharmaceutical company. The company being in a critical product manufacturing category and also a research intensive organization, lay significant importance on employee welfare and engagement as the work here tends to be very intellectually exhaustive. The aim of the study was to understand the various spiritual practices being undertaken by employees of various religious backgrounds in the organization. The methodology adopted was one to one personal interviews with employees and HR officials in the organization.

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This paper was an attempt to examine religion in the global workplace. It identifies religion as an issue of current and significant importance to organizations, with considerable relevance to international organizations. It ties together research and concepts from many disparate areas, including religion and human resource management to provide some framework for managers in managing religious diversity, and for researchers to further examine the issue. The paper focuses on major work issues raised by faiths in India and the US.

Due to confidentiality issues the name of the organization is not disclosed and the company has been referred to as ABC pharmaceuticals. ABC Pharmaceuticals Ltd. is an integrated Pharmaceutical Company manufacturing a large range of products which manufactures both Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients and Finished Dosage Forms. The company is in the business unit of Finished Dosage Forms. The recommendations are for reference in the same office, and to be applied to other plants and units later. The company is focused on improvement in technology and new products duly integrated through their sophisticated Research & Development Department. The four business units under the company include:

- *Finished Dosage Forms* – Covers the needs of International markets with a range of more than 100 dosage forms including Tablets, Capsules, Dry Powder, Suspension and Injectables.

- *Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients* – The company manufactures a range of APIs including Sterile Cephalosporins, and others including Macrolides and Cardiovascular range

- *Research and Development* – ABC Research Laboratories (ARL), wing of ABC pharmaceuticals Ltd. is an emerging research organization with particular interests in the areas of drug discovery, polymer technology and synthesis of new molecules. ARL is a 100% subsidiary of ABC Ltd. recognized by the Department of Science and Industrial Research (DSIR), Government of India. The company is staffed with competent and dedicated team of scientists.

- *Consumer Healthcare* – The company entered in the FMCG category, both oral and personal care, with the launch of Jhilmil Family Toothpaste. The company plans to launch many more health & hygiene products under its umbrella brand.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Workplace Spirituality

The origin of the concept of spirituality at workplace began in developed nations, specially in countries in Europe and some parts of United States (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2007; Tischler, 1999). Quantitative research studies suggest that workplace spirituality is related to attitude towards work in factors such as organizational commitment, quitting intentions, work satisfaction, involvement in job and organization based self-esteem (Milliman et al., 2003). Some studies also suggest that it is inversely related to organizational frustration and workplace disengagement (Kolodinsky, Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2008). Marques (2005) defines workplace spirituality as experience of interconnectedness and trust among employees for individual goodwill; leading to collective motivational organizational culture leading to organizational excellence (Marques 2005). Garcia-Zamor (2003) suggested that "bringing spirituality into the workplace could create a different organizational culture in which the employee would be more satisfied and would have an improved performance" (Daniel 2010)

Workplace spirituality is a sense of established belongingness; connect amongst one another and the workplace community. It is not necessarily about the religion or conversion or about believing in a specific religion born into. It is a platform that has an established understanding between the leader and follower who are given chance to understand themselves and build a sense of meaning and purpose for their lives. As a workplace accommodation, it begins with understanding of expectations, acknowledgement that people have both an inner and an outer life and that the nourishment of the inner life can produce a more purposeful and productive outer life that is beneficial for employee well-being, corporate responsibility and sustainability as well as financial performance. The advantage of ensuring spirituality at workplace is that people have greater potential to become whole. They have a deeper connection with the meaning of what they do. From that experience comes vital energy, real commitment, creativity and a generosity of spirit in contributing to our mission. Fostering spirituality, the workplace grows as a true community of mutual care and service and organizational practice is infused with depth and reflective process. In this context, there is potential for both individual and organizational transformation.

Workplace Religion

As workplaces continue to become more diverse, religion is becoming a significant workplace issue. Employees of diverse backgrounds may request accommodation to practice daily religious activities or to follow their religious beliefs. Under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, (American law) employers must provide a reasonable accommodation for requests that are based on employees' sincerely held religious beliefs or practices unless doing so would impose an undue hardship on their business operations. In addition employers must ensure that employees are not discriminated against or harassed on the basis of religion. The Title VII of the Civil Rights Act requires employers to:

- Provide a workplace free from religious discrimination (including harassment)

- Provide a reasonable accommodation for employees seriously held religious beliefs unless the accommodation would impose an undue hardship on the company. (What constitutes reasonable accommodation and undue hardship depends on each situation's facts.)

There are several types of religious issues that appear in the workplace like complaints of discrimination (including harassment) and requests for religious accommodations and to use the employer's property for religious practices or activities. It is important to prevent religious discrimination and provide accommodations when possible because the concept and right of freedom of religion are highly valued and protected under the constitution and federal and state laws. Addressing religious concerns at workplace engages the employees and makes them feel inclusive.

Relationship Between Spirituality and Religion

The objective of this report is to identify and highlight the relationship between religion and spirituality. It is influenced by one of the interviews of the much esteemed, respected Dalai Lama, in Ethics for New Millennium where he brought to light the relation that religion and spirituality share. Religion is to be concerned with faith in the claims of one faith tradition or another, an aspect of which is the acceptance of some form of heaven or nirvana. Connected with this are religious teachings or dogma, ritual prayer, and so on. Spirituality on the other hand, is concerned with those qualities of the human spirit such as love and compassion, patience tolerance, forgiveness, contentment, a sense of responsibility, a sense of harmony which brings happiness to both self and others.

Spirituality as manifested through these qualities provides the foundation for most, if not all, of the world's spiritual and religious traditions. Both non-denominational spiritual practices and world religions all are fundamentally based on hope/faith in a vision of love and service of others.

This explains what some people and organizations mean when they claim to be spiritual and not religious. Consequently, spiritual leadership can be implemented and practiced with or without religious theory, beliefs, and practices. In this study the researcher has chosen to use the term spirituality to allow for its application to any organization interested in implementing workplace spirituality. However, this is in no way meant to imply that nondenominational or nontheistic spiritual practices are superior to the religious traditions and their beliefs and practices. The literature review comprises review of four major studies carried out in this domain. The review throws light on the key findings while identifying the problem addressed and the limitations of the study.

Managing Diversity: Impact of Religion in the Indian Workplace

The author, with the help of the paper, intended to examine the presence of religion in the Indian workplace through cultural values, beliefs and management practices and their impact on HR practices in managing diversity. The paper is divided into two sections. The first one draws from research done in cross cultural management and world religions, and thereby examines the possible nexus between religion and work culture. The second section is a perception study of senior executives on the topic of religious diversity at work. A key finding of the paper was that religion had an impact on the management styles and philosophy. The traditions of respecting the age and seniority were found to be a contributing factor towards higher power distance. Also emerging from the study was the fact that HR policies and decisions were secular and religion-neutral. Another major impact area was observances, holidays and the appearance of people at workplace. Each had either a direct or indirect touch of religion in it. The paper has certain limitations. The primary focus of research is Indian and U.S. firms in India. Also it synthesizes concepts and research with broad brush strokes as a precursor to developing hypotheses for testing in empirical research. Further research is needed to get into the specifics. It is a survey of the managers rather than the managed and hence fails to determine their experience of religious diversity at work and examining the diversity issues for Indian MNCs in their global operations.

Rationale for Spirituality in Organizations

The author has identified a paradigm shift in the consciousness of workers and managers at all levels of the organization. The shift has been towards seeking more meaning and fulfilment in the work they do. The paper attempts to define and understand spirituality in the workplace while understanding the factors that propel it. The author propounds that the modern society has transformed but management philosophies haven't been able to change at the same rate. The modern day employee is not just looking at effectiveness and efficiency. A shift in the consciousness of the workforce across organizational levels and an emphasis on spiritual principles and practices are what the authors point out as the foundation of the characteristics of the "new management paradigm". The authors use an array of literature to define spirituality in a plethora of ways. They conclusively define workplace spirituality as _an individual phenomenon comprising either distinct individual effort. It refers to the efforts towards integration of spirituality and work by both the individual and organization simultaneously. 'They use threads from Indian thought and Western thought to address spirituality in workplace. The paper outlines the Mitroff and Denton models of designing spirituality oriented organizations and goes on to gauge the impact of workplace spirituality on organizational behaviour and performance. It goes on to say that there is a significant relationship between spirituality and performance. The major conclusions of the paper are that many individuals have spiritual beliefs but struggle to articulate or enact these principles at work. Some of the prevalent cultural norms hamper the expression of spirituality. It calls for a combination of contemplation and action, vision and implementation in every action. The limitations of this study are that it fails to distinguish between spirituality and religion. The emphasis is more on spirituality than on religion. The research is based more on the literature review of existing study and does not attribute any primary research to its findings.

THE RISE OF RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY IN WORKPLACE

Employee's Rights and Employers Accommodations

The laws of the land in the US require the employers to accommodate the spirituality and religious beliefs which the employees bring to the workplace. The paper defines spirituality and religion in the context of a workplace and tries to understand the growing significance of this domain. The paper then explores the legal issues of employers' duty to accommodate their employees' religious and spiritual beliefs and concludes with some recommendations to employers. The authors start off by trying to define the keywords of religion and spirituality. More people are looking for a closer relationship between meaning in their lives and in their workplace. According to the study, this increasing attention to the value of work may, in part, be rooted in the fact that employees are feeling more dehumanized and devalued in a work environment made even more insecure by downsizing and restructuring. The study however falls short of defining either religion or spirituality because according to them, most employees have different concepts of religion and spirituality, which makes it difficult to reach clear and absolute definitions.

The study points out the growing trend of diverse spiritual practices which could consequently mean that employees' spirituality could manifest in many different forms in the workplace. Seeding from the inability to put forward a universal definition of religion, the authors push for a legal definition of religion and use many precedent lawsuits to make their points. Based on its study, the paper charts out various recommendations on how to accommodate the religious beliefs of its employee. For the observances of holy days, the authors suggest having flexible holiday schedules and a having a list of backup resources that could possibly fill in when the incumbent is observing a holy day. For the appearance of the individual, the authors are of the opinion that wearing religious articles should be allowed provided that they are small, non-offensive and non-obtrusive. Such cases for religious accommodations cannot be covered under a single blanket rule or policy and need to be treated on a case-by-case basis. The authors conclude the paper by stating their view that accommodating employees' spiritual needs as much as possible benefits any organization. Because today's employees have less connectedness to extended families, neighborhoods, and other support groups, they seek more meaning at work. Thus work is one of the primary places to connect with others.

By striving to accommodate employees spiritual needs, organizations could gain more commitment and loyalty from their employees and benefit both employees and business objectives. The paper, though extensive, covers the topic from an American perspective. With a highly globalized world, it makes more sense to have the research done from a global perspective and provide for recommendations which may touch and affect the corporations with a global footprint.

Spirituality in the Workplace: Implications for Employees and Organizations.

The paper identifies three questions viz. How and to what degree does the role of spirituality in the workplace affect organizational performance and or productivity? What are the benefits related to integrating spirituality into the workplace? And what are employee perceptions as to how workplace spirituality impacts their work attitudes? The author, alike the authors of the previous papers points out that research has failed to produce a common definition of spirituality; but says that if one word could be used to capture the meaning of spirituality, it would be interconnectedness.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To understand employers and employees take on religious and spiritual practices at workplace
- To analyze workplace spirituality practices being undertaken in Indian organizations
- To identify the legal issues of employers 'duty to accommodate their employees' religious and spiritual beliefs

RESEARCH AND FINDINGS

Tools Used

Desk/Secondary Data

- Existing framework/data from:
- Research papers
- Internet

Primary Data

- Focus group discussions
- Personal interviews (questionnaire)

Sampling Technique

Sample Unit: HR Managers, Shop Floor Workers

Sampling Method: Random

Sample Size: 10% (based on ABC practice) Random (if sample is too large or actual population is too small). The plant and corporate HR managers of some 10 Indian multinational companies.

Research Questions

- The research questions for the study were:
- How does religion and spiritual diversity shape the culture of an organization?
- How does it impact management styles and ethos?
- How does it impact HR practices within the organization?
- Religious Diversity: By default or by design
- Religious clashes and reconciliation

A questionnaire was prepared and circulated to the HR managers of the above mentioned organizations to understand these objectives. There were also interactions with 15 shop–floor workers at the plant to understand the infiltration of religion and spirituality and its impact in the workplace in line with the changing demographics.

KEY INSIGHTS

The key insights gathered from this research are divided into two parts:

a) Insights gathered from the HR managers

b) Insights gathered from the shop floor workers

Insights gathered from the HR managers

How does religion and spiritual diversity shape the culture of the organization?

The organizations which were surveyed are witnessing prolific expansion and the tide of globalization has made it imperative for the organizations to adopt an inclusive culture where an amalgamation of various cultures and religious beliefs co-exist in harmony. Moreover, there is a tendency of the organization to move towards a standardized culture across geographies to reduce the problems of expatriates.

How does religion and spirituality impact management styles and ethos?

As per these research findings, religion and spirituality has a great impact on management styles and ethos. There was a time when the management style was extremely rigid. However, with the increasing religious and spiritual diversity in the workforce, the management style has moved from rigid to flexible. Presently, the management style is not confined to a particular location/state/country but across geographies. The corporate HR manager of one of the organizations that was surveyed said, —With the changing times, it has become a compulsion to implement changes in the management principles of the organization.

Although the same was in existence for 50+ years, we realized that if we do not change, the key asset of the organization – its employees will suffer." The plant HR manager of another organization surveyed said, —I have been in the plant for the past 7 years and today I have a workforce comprising of 50% localites only. There has been an influx of workforce from various states of India and presently my workforce consists of people from 9 states of India and 4 different religious beliefs. It is therefore very important that as a plant manager, I align my management style to a universal one so that my workforce is happy and productive."

How does religion and spiritual diversity impact the HR practices of the organization?

The research shows that the HR practices of the organizations have undergone a significant change to build an inclusive culture of religion and spiritual diversity. The key changes in the HR practices at organizations according to the target pool of interviewees: - a) Recruitment and Selection: All the organizations are branding themselves as one which is highly diversified not only in terms of business but also workforce. The pre-placement talks at various B – schools and UG colleges emphasize on the learning quotient one will get by working with the diverse population and to reinforce the same, the organizations make it a point to give statistics of their diverse workforce. Also, during the selection process, focus is given to recruit diverse talent. The HR managers are focusing on religion and spiritual diversity because they view it as an opportunity for mutual learning. The HR manager of the FMCG organization of India said, "When we recruit a diverse talent, we view it as an opportunity for the organization to learn from them. Given the fact that our culture and management style is continuously changing, we view this as an opportunity for continuous improvement. This also gives us a chance to gauge the suitability of the present management and HR practices in the organization to a diverse workforce." b) Training and Development: This research shows that the organizations are adopting innovative training and development practices to make the workplace a better place for a diversified

workforce. Amongst the organizations that were surveyed, four of them have incorporated a compulsory module in their training charter focused on training the employees how to work with a religiously and spiritually diversified workforce. The module includes giving the employees an overview of the present workforce demographics, practices of the organization to efficiently manage a religiously and spiritually diverse workforce and also the need behind the same. c) Employee Engagement All the organizations that we surveyed are incorporating innovative employee engagement practices. This includes developing an employee forum specially for handling employee grievances related to any sort of discrimination on religious and/or spiritual grounds.

The HR manager of an eminent FMCG organization talked about a very innovative practice in his organization. "While we continuously try to build an inclusive culture in our organization, there are situations where an employee might still face discrimination or misbehaviour on grounds of religion and spirituality. We, therefore, have incorporated a dedicated forum for handling employee grievances on these grounds and we make sure action is taken within the next 72 hours." Also, the organizations have started granting paid leaves on days when an employee has any religious commitment apart from Eid, Christmas, and Diwali, etc. One of the leading manufacturing organization of India grants its Bengali employees paid leave for Durga Puja because it's their annual festival. The HR manager of that organization opined that "We grant all of our employees holidays during Diwali. But the Bengali employees celebrate their festival before Diwali and for them it is their biggest festival of the year. So, we have this option that interested people can exchange their Diwali leave for Durga Puja leave so that they can go and celebrate the festival with their friends and family. Incorporated on a trial basis five years ago, the idea was an instant hit and we are proud to be the pioneers. After us, four other manufacturing organizations of India have adopted this practice and have experienced resounding success."

Religious Diversity

By default or by design research suggests that there is no fixed technique adopted to foster religious diversity. What we got to know was that the changing workforce demographics along with globalization, kind of, made it a compulsion for the organizations to welcome diversity in their workplace. The HR manager of one of the largest FMCG organization was of the opinion that "When we set forth towards consolidating our India operations, we realized that the country has a huge talent pool and inclusion of such talented workforce would mean that we embrace diversity because they were from a variety of castes, religion and spiritual beliefs. We understood that the age -old practice won"t suffice in this regard and thus molded our organizational structure and practices. So, when you ask me whether we have incorporated religious diversity by default or by design, it is difficult to choose a particular option. The default reason brought in restructuring of our organization and slowly but surely, we ensured that it is inculcated in our culture and be an integral part of our core design principles".

Religious Clashes and Reconciliations

When asked whether the practices of the organization to manage a religious and spiritually diversified workforce have been fruitful, all the responses were affirmative. The managers agreed that molding the culture of the organization indeed had a big hand to reduce religious clashes. Besides, the organizations have adopted the practice of letting their employees celebrate their regional festivals in full capacity. The HR manager of an organization known in India for making high quality steel responded, "In our organization, we have all kinds of festivals celebrated round the year – ranging from Onam, Navratri, Durga Puja, Lohri, Eid, Christmas and the likes. What we have observed is that celebration of such festivals together brings the entire organization closer and people learn to respect the religious differences and take part in them enthusiastically".

Insights Gathered From Shop – Floor Workers

Focused group discussions with shop – floor workers yielded the following key insights:-

They are happy working with a religiously and spiritually diversified workforce. Most of them cited that the measures taken by the organization have gone a long way in making them understand the necessity of this practice.

The workers of that particular plant celebrate 7 festivals every year and all of them participate very enthusiastically. In fact, one of them said that in every festival, it's not that only the regional people or people from a particular caste participate but the entire organization comes forward to celebrate the spirit of brotherhood.

The workers, in particular, praised the organization practice of apprising them the need for this change. One of them expressed his views "We are no match to the educational qualifications of the top management and do not understand these nitty-gritties of religious and spiritual diversity and workforce change management. For us, it's only work that matters and we like working with people with our caste and beliefs. It was difficult for us initially to accept the change but then the support that we received from the managers helped us a lot to adapt to this change and now, we are very happy working and learning together." (Translated from Hindi)

CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The discussion and analysis in this paper indicate that religion and spirituality has a great impact on people's values, attitudes and behaviour at workplace. An understanding of these concepts allows managers to understand why accommodations are necessary to avoid conflict. Research indicates that few firms currently provide training to managers to understand the nature of religions and cultures represented in their workforce, and to learn of their firm's policies and procedures for dealing with religious based conflicts (SHRM, 2001). Our research will serve as a benchmarking tool for forward-looking organizations to understand the current practices of religion and spiritual diversity across organizations and accordingly develop their own model for the benefit of the employees and other key stakeholders.

Recommendations

Observance of religious holidays and days off for religious events – This can be facilitated by asking other employees to work on the employee's off days, rescheduling shifts, and maintaining lists of employees willing to work on certain days. All of this needs to be documented and communicated to the employees, management and union

Allowing/disallowing employees to wear religious items on their person during work - this practice be allowed only for small, non-offensive, non-obtrusive articles, that are not too loud and strong in expressing one's religious sentiments.

Placing religious or spiritual articles on their desk, bookshelf, or office wall: Allowing employees to place religious or spiritual articles in their private offices, cubicles, drawers, etc. Such articles also, like those worn, must be small, non-offensive, and non-obtrusive.

Sensitization of the employees/workers and management – All deeply held beliefs should be respected and no form of offensive remarks, verbal or written, direct or indirect, should be encouraged within the premises. The importance of diversity should be inculcated and made a core value in the organization.

Penalty for violation of rules – All rules should be documented and communicated as a part of the code of conduct and updated regularly too. Any violation of the code should attract severe penalty/punishment which should be displayed at visible notice boards across the work location.

Limitations of the Study

The primary limitation of our research lies in terms of the number of organizations surveyed. The entire research proposal is based on the data available from 11 organizations across three sectors – FMCG, Energy and Manufacturing. Secondly, we could speak to the employees of ABC Pharmaceuticals only and therefore failed to understand how the industry practices are impacting its human capital. Lastly, this research does not provide any model which can be used by organizations to successfully inculcate a culture of religious and spiritual diversity at workplace

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