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Spirituality at Workplace and Commitment to Change: The case of secondary school teachers in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence spirituality at workplace on teachers' organizational commitment to change in the context of secondary school in Malaysia. The data for this study was collected using a set of questionnaire distributed to 989 trained teachers from 87 national secondary schools across three states of the Northern Peninsular of Malaysia. The findings revealed that all dimensions of spirituality at workplace namely, meaningful work, sense of belonging to community, and coherence with organizational values were found to be positively influence on commitment to change (personal goals, capacity belief, context belief, and emotional arousal). Findings from this study have several implications. Firstly, this study represents the theoretical or empirical research regarding spirituality at workplace on commitment to change in secondary school education learning. Secondly, despite the fact that spirituality at workplace is an important factor which could enhance higher commitment, these findings also have added value to literatures on Malaysia education management especially in Malaysian secondary school settings since there were limited literatures done on similar setting. As a conclusion, this study suggests that school administrators should fully exploit the role of spirituality at workplace in order to increase teachers' commitment to change and performance.

Key words: Spirituality at workplace, Commitment to change, Malaysian secondary school.

INTRODUCTION

In the managerial domain, for-profit based organizations are facing various challenges in human resource management and productivity. In response to these problems, many forward-thinking organizations are striving to create a positive organizational climate such as spirituality at work place in order to keep employees through various human resources management initiatives (Bygrave & Macmillan, 2008, Neal & Bennet, 2000; Rego & Cunha, 2007; Samer, 2008). But the two constructs, spirituality at workplace and organizational commitment to change seemed to have been examined almost independently and have not been given emphasis in the Malaysian educational context. According to Selvarajah and Denny (2008), non-profit organizations such as schools provides a multifunctional team moving along a horizontal structure where it is vital to fully understand the teachers' perception of managers' power besides their roles and contribution to the organization. School managers are encouraged to work with teachers, involving them corporately, maintaining connectedness at work, and deeper values (Leithwood, 1992), and initiative in a way team spirit which benefits the school as a whole (Robbins, 2005). As a result it is believed that the spirituality would enhance organizational learning (Fry, 2003), unify and build communities (Cavanaugh et al., (2002), serve the need for connecting to others at work,

and to work itself (Mitroff & Denton, 1999), and is the source of a healing and harmonizing expression, wisdom, and connectedness that transcends all egocentric, socio-centric, or anthropocentric forms (Maxwell, 2003). In spite of such paucity, Pawar (2003) points out that given how much time people spend at work and how work is partly responsible for people's social identity, it all depends on how a leader who practices spirit building can have significant impact on organizational life and ultimately organizational success. Nevertheless, the emerging construct such as spirituality at workplace which brings their commitment to transform organizations from merely mission-driven activities into places where individual and collective spirituality are encouraged and spiritual development is integrated into day-to-day work life.

Ministry of Education in Malaysia through Institute of Aminuddin Baki, has begun generic areas training to school managers since 90s as a tool to develop effective leadership (Ibrahim, 1996). With the integration of spirituality at workplace and effective leadership practices, it is hoped that school effectiveness can be further enhanced. Unfortunately, the lack of research in spirituality at workplace in the Malaysian schools context has created a gap between the understanding of work place spirituality's potential in contributing to school effectiveness and culture. The present study is an attempt to bridge this gap and is aimed at enhancing management skills of school managers in facing the ever-changing educational environment.

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Therefore, the major concern of this research is to examine whether spirituality at workplace and organizational commitment to change are applicable in the Malaysian various type of secondary school context. In the view of the above objective, the questions that are to be addressed in this study are: Is there a positive relationship between spirituality at work place such as meaningful work, sense of belonging to community, and coherence with organizational and commitment to change?

Literature Review

Spirituality at Workplace

Workplace spirituality is a new topic to organizational literature and is a topic with limited theoretical development (Fry, 2003). However Ashmos and Duchon (2000) suggest that workplace can be considered to be spiritual (or spirit friendly) when it recognizes that employees have life that nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work that takes place in the context of community. Therefore, workplace spirituality can be defined as "the recognition that employees have an inner life that nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work that takes place in the context community" (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). While from the organizational perspective, workplace spirituality is also described as "spirit at work". Spirit at work is a term that describes the experiences which employees are passionate about and being energized by their work, finding meaning and purpose in their work besides freedom of expressing themselves, and a connectedness to their colleagues. In context to this study, spirituality at workplace is associated with pleasant experiences at workplace and the mental cohesion of the workers towards their work-scope (Maxwell, 2003; Pawar, 2003; Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Mitroff & Denton, 1999; Nasina & Koh, 2011; Kanesan, 2003). The positive experiences in workplace eventually funnels the workers to conceptualize the workplace as not merely a place to work or make a living, but is perceived as a place that provides and fulfils personal satisfaction in relation with Maslov theory of needs (Yukl, 2002; Ashmos & Duchon, 2000).

Spirituality at Workplace and Organizational Commitment

The findings from the previous research shows that in the transformation process of a for-profit organization, spirituality at work place is found to be able to increase productivity (Petchsawang, 2008) and employees' technical innovation (Goertzen & Barbuto, 2001). Meanwhile, research by Krishnakumar and Neck (2002) discovered that spirituality practices at workplace are able to enhance intituity and creativity, honesty and trust, personal fulfillment, and organizational commitment. Meanwhile Kale and Shrivastava (2003) suggested that spirituality will influence capability which will boost personal development where this factor is closely related with creativity. In addition, Petchsawang (2008) believed that a display of spirituality will enhance enjoyment and pleasure in workplace and this in return generates workers' creativity. Moreover, an increase in creativity propels the organizations' performance and brings a rise in the organization's income. On top of that Ketchand and Strawser (2001) also emphasized that the increase in capability and creativity becomes the main resort in overcoming problems in the organization.

According to Kale and Shrivastava (2003) and Ketchand and Strawser (2001), spirituality in workplace will increase work commitment with the existence of trustful Climate. Trustful Climate that exists becomes the catalyst in an increase of work productivity among employees. As such, an individual will feel themselves as a part of the organization (Petchsawang, 2008; Milliman et al., 2002). Besides, the practice of workplace spirituality will also generate emotional bonds between the employees and the organization. When employees are attached with emotional bonds and affective commitment, the vision and mission of the organization becomes a common goal and objective among the employees (Krishnakumar & Neck, 2002; Milliman et al., 2002). Nevertheless, in order to create such commitment, the main factor that needs cultivation among subordinates is trust. Therefore, the commitment to change among subordinates will only exist if employees trust the organization (Goertzen & Barbuto, 2001; Krishnakumar & Neck, 2002; Milliman et al., 2002).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants

The data for this study was collected from 989 trained teachers in 87 types of National Secondary Schools across the three States of Northern Peninsular Malaysia, namely Penang, Kedah and Perlis using a convenient sampling. The pre-requisite for teacher participation as respondents in this study was that the teachers must have worked for at least a year under the incumbent principals. The sample consists of 78 percent female respondents, 22 percent male respondents, while an overall of 86 percent respondents with working experience of more than five years.

Instruments

A set of questionnaires were employed in this study, combining five Likert scales measuring work place spirituality (WP), and commitment to change (CC). The questionnaires were distributed to selected schools. Work place spirituality was measured using 20-items developed by Kinjerski et al., (2004) and Ashmos and Duchon (2000) on five-point Likert-type scale. The commitment to change questionnaires which was adapted from Ford (1992) can be tracked through four variables, namely personal goals, capacity beliefs, context beliefs, and emotional process.

RESULTS

Preliminary analyses of correlations between research variables are presented in Table 1 below and the unit analysis in this study was at school level, which is defined as the aggregate mean representing each school. An examination of the means of subscales of spirituality at workplace revealed that subscales are ranging between 3.67 and 4.37. It can be concluded that the level of spirituality at workplace practices in Malaysian national secondary schools was high based on Kinjerski et al., (2004) categorization. The Pearson correlation matrix revealed that all three workplace spirituality subscales were significantly ($p<.01$) and positively correlated with leadership effectiveness (ranging from .37 to .49) and commitment to change (ranging from .32 to .46).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	Mean	S.D.
1.Meaningful Work	-						3.99	.65
2. Sense of Community	.33	-					4.37	.49
3. Coherent with Organizational Values	.24	.33	-				3.67	.71
4.Personal Goals	.37	.42	.35	-			3.81	.73
5.Capacity Belief	.49	.38	.39	.46	-		3.42	.59
6.Context Belief	.41	.37	.32	.42	.42	-	3.72	.65
7.Emotional Arousal	.32	.34	.33	.45	.44	.37	3.71	.56

Note: all variables are significantly correlated at p<.01
Variables 1-3 are subscales of Workplace Spirituality
Variables 4-7 are subscales of Commitment to Change

Multiple regression analysis was carried out to test the direct effects on spirituality at workplace on commitment to change. Table 2 presents the results of the analyses. The findings from Table 2 shows that all dimensions of work place spirituality which are meaningful work, sense of belonging to community, and coherent with organizational values were found to have significant impact on four dimensions of commitment to change, namely personal goals, capacity belief, context belief, and emotional arousal, which explained about 24%, 25%, 29% and 24 % of variability in personal goals, capacity belief, context belief, and emotional arousal.

Table 2. Regression results between Spirituality at Workplace and Commitment to Change

Independent Variables	Commitment to change			
	Personal Goals	Capacity Belief	Context Belief	Emotional Arousal
Meaningful Work (MW)	.23**	.23**	.39**	.23**
Sense of Community (SC)	.32**	.29**	.26**	.32**
Coherent with Organizational Values (OV)	.36**	.36**	.23**	.36**
R^2	.24	.25	.30	.24
Adjusted R^2	.24	.25	.29	.24
F Value	52.85**	18.10**	11.24**	52.85**

* $p<.05$, ** $p<.001$

DISCUSSION

In general, the findings from schools involved in the study indicates a high level of workplace spirituality practices, which concretize the statements of Mitchell et al. (2001) as teachers stated teaching career as a meaningful work in their lives, being able to create good relationship among peer teachers and accepting them as a part of family besides adapting the school aims and mission as of their own. Apart from that, the study also proves that aspects related to genders, size of school populations and the locality of the schools is not the influencing factor to the high level of spirituality practices found in these schools. These findings provide an understanding that teachers formulate as a community deploys close relationship by helping each other and protects one another as colleagues. Thus, the teaching community that possesses high level of spirituality will have the capability to create and build a strong culture amongst them and accepting their organizational members as a constituent of their own family. In addition to this, as stated by Petchsawang, (2008), Krishnakumar and Neck (2002), workplace spirituality has a positive impact on teachers' commitment to change.

In other words, if a school practices high spiritual "fit" in others and allows the expression of employees' spiritual self or comfort with an organization and with his or her environment, the teachers would feel more committed. As Day et al. (2000) and Hawley (1996) mentioned, the better the fit, the higher the likelihood that an employee will feel professionally and personally tied to (or embedded in) the organization. Besides that, the results also demonstrated that spirituality practices at work place have predictive power over commitment to change. This therefore confirms the causal chain of effects as proposed by Yukl (2002) which states that an organization with high spirituality would increase employees' satisfaction and commitment and also departmental performance.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Findings from this study have several implications. Firstly, this study represents the theoretical or empirical research regarding spirituality at workplace on commitment to change in secondary school education learning. Secondly, despite the fact that spirituality at workplace is an important factor that could enhance higher commitment, these findings also have added value to literatures on Malaysia's education management especially in various types of Malaysian secondary school settings since there were limited literatures done on similar setting. Exploring the phenomenon of spirituality at work place among educational learning in Malaysia has certainly broadened the understanding of spirituality at school settings on commitment to change. Certainly, this study has inevitably developed some guidelines for scholars as well as leaders on effective ways of enhancing the spirituality at workplace. From the results of this study, it can be concluded that the spirituality at work place is an important element in shaping teachers' organizational commitment to change in various ways. Meanwhile, this study has also provided empirical evidences of the impact of spirituality at work place on teachers' commitment to change. Therefore, as a conclusion, this study recommends that the Malaysian school administrators should fully exploit the role of spirituality at workplace in order to increase teachers' commitment to change and performance.

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