What Spirituality Can Bring to Leaders and Managers: Enabling Creativity, Empathy and a Stress Free Workplace

Uday Shinde
Governors State University

Emma Fleck
Colorado Mesa University

In light of the dynamic requirements made upon managers and leaders in a global business environment, the need for creativity and empathy, and a stress free environment are increasingly valued in the workplace. The present paper addresses this need and suggests an interdisciplinary management model based on the field of spirituality and religiosity in the workplace (SRW). Based on a review of the literature and a preliminary qualitative assessment, the paper proposes that SRW can play a critical role as an enabler for the above mentioned outcomes and ultimately, organizational performance. Possible model extensions are also explored.

INTRODUCTION

Tune Yourself with the Creative Power of Spirit – Paramahamsa Yogananda

The present study was originally conceived a response to the call for papers sent out by the Southwest Academy of Management (SWAM), wherein the practice of management was envisaged as a *calling* encouraging authors to explore novel ways and approaches to management. While the field of management has been extensively researched for over 100 years, this call provides researchers an opportunity to examine the field afresh and in the light of newer developments within and outside its traditional boundaries.

In view of this invitation, the specific purpose of the current paper is to explore and present the process of management as viewed from the lens of spirituality in the workplace. This is an area that alongside religiosity (SRW), has gained extensive attention in recent times (Neal, 2013; Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2010; Miller & Ewest, 2013; Lund Dean & Fornaciari, 2007). One of the aims of this paper is to present some of the possible benefits of spirituality to managers and leaders. As such, the paper focuses on how spirituality might be considered as a resource for managers, especially as an enabler of individual outcomes such as creativity and innovation, stress reduction, and connectedness. These outcomes have in the past been associated with organizational performance, job satisfaction, job involvement and stakeholder relationships (Kolodinsky et al, 2008; Gupta and Singh, 2010) and the present study is an attempt at bringing to light new information to the current field in a similar vein.

The above call from SWAM is indeed timely; for the environment within which organizations function, both immediately and in terms of the larger picture, has seen tremendous upheavals over the past decade or so. This includes a state of flux in the external environment that few could have envisaged

in the boom period of the mid-nineties. Consequently the immediate environment in its various facets too has seen the rise of numerous phenomena worthy of scientific attention such as social entrepreneurship, sustainability, ethics, social justice and, of course, spirituality. It is interesting to note that Professor Judy Neal of the Sam Walton School of Business (2013), suggests that it is in fact spirituality that can be considered as the main driver to other movements such as that of sustainability that have caught public and academic attention over the past few years.

Whether the increased interest in spirituality in the workplace can be attributed solely to the tumultuous environment or to other factors would make an interesting topic for another study, however, it can be said that attention to this area has certainly received an impetus and SRW is now regarded an important issue in organization management (Wong and Hu, 2011).

Researchers point out that possible contributors from the macro environment include social upheavals (Mitroff & Denton, 1999), globalization (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003), and downsizing (Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2004). Marques et al. (2007) also suggest that the looming finality of death for a large section of the population (baby-boomers) might also be contributive to the increased interest in spirituality in the past decade. In terms of the task environment, these authors also point out that the increased amount of time spent at the workplace might also motivate the interest of spirituality in the workplace. Moreover, Zsolnai et al. (2011) suggest workers' need for personal development, the democratization of the workplace and demands by stakeholders as possible factors as well. Miller (2007) also argues that employees' need to integrate all aspects of their lives, including the spiritual with the professional, might also be another reason for this dramatic interest in the phenomenon.

Fifteen years ago, Mitroff and Denton (1999) made a bold assertion in their article, 'A Study of Spirituality in the Workplace' in the Sloan Management Review, asking that "spirituality be integrated with management". The present call for papers viewing management as a calling allows for a perfect canvas wherein to reexamine this connection. The current paper is organized in the following sections:

First, we conduct a review of the literature related to spirituality in the workplace. Next, we explore the various facets within management which might be impacted by spirituality by reviewing relevant literature. The findings of the literature review are compared to an analysis of interviews conducted with participants in the study which lends support to its main premise that spirituality can be an enabler of creativity, empathy and stress reduction in the workplace. Finally, a spirituality based model for management with a special emphasis on innovation, stress reduction and stakeholder relationships along with propositions for further research are presented.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND PRELIMINARY QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT

In order to further investigate the model suggested in the study, which would otherwise have been a purely theoretical piece, the authors conducted semi-structured interviews with 11 participants who practiced spirituality as defined in the study. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, were assured anonymity and were encouraged to be open ended in their responses so as to lend richness to the conclusions of the paper. The participants ranged from ages 18 to 58 and were engaged in spiritual disciplines for at least one year. While all of them were employed, only about seven of the participants worked full time.

Each of the participants engaged in discussion with the investigators for approximately 40 minutes and the questions were deliberately kept informal with the view that this would allow participants greater leeway in generating discussion and potentially insightful comments.

What is Spirituality and How Might It be Related to the Workplace?
The idea of spirituality has to be clearly understood if meaningful research is to be conducted (Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2010). This includes clarity in definitions, which, not unlike other areas in their initial stages of development such as entrepreneurship or leadership, seems to be quite elusive (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2008). Despite numerous and laudable efforts in trying to understand the concept of spirituality, authors within the management area are still not entirely decided as to what it actually means.

Gotsis and Kortezi (2008) in an excellent review of the literature explain that much of the understanding tends to be particularistic emphasizing one aspect of spirituality or another without bringing forth the universal characteristic of the term. Other authors have argued that it is virtually impossible to have consensus regarding the definition of spirituality (Ashforth & Pratt, 2002).

Nevertheless, the importance of having some consensus in understanding this concept is important (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2010) if the field has to be advanced any further. In an effort to move a step forward in this direction, we use the broad definition developed by Shinde (2014) to clarify this ambiguous concept. Spirituality is defined as *"an individual's journey towards finding a Higher Power (irrespective of how this Higher Power is conceptualized, whether as God or as a Higher Self), supplemented by consistent efforts made towards this purpose and characterized by a universal outlook"*

This definition is non-controversial in the sense that it neither excludes a religious viewpoint, nor emphasizes it. In other words, an individual can be religious and spiritual simultaneously; at the same time non-affiliation to religion does not prevent one from being spiritual. Furthermore, this definition is supported by quantitative and qualitative research that the author conducted with subjects who represented three major world religious traditions. The above definition presents spirituality as a multi-dimensional concept and further conceptualizes three main aspects of spirituality – a) Belief in a Higher Power that is beyond sensory perception, b) Consistent efforts to realize and actualize this Power, and c) A universal outlook that characterizes individual spirituality.

Gotsis & Kortezi (2008) in an examination of the field of SRW suggest that most studies in the area can be classified as based on either particular frameworks or viewpoints (such as a religious context) or on consequences of SRW such as the impact of spirituality on various outcomes. Further, Kolodinsky et al. (2008) suggest that most of these studies can be grouped under the main areas of individual spirituality, organizational spirituality and interactive spirituality. Individual spirituality refers to the spiritual values and affiliations that an individual brings to the workplace, organizational spirituality refers to the spiritual culture of the workplace and interactive spirituality is concerned more with the individual and organizational spirituality "fit". The last conceptualization is based on the concept of the person-organization (PO) fit which examines how well individual spirituality might align with organizational spirituality and the possible outcomes of such a fit (or a lack thereof). Wong and Hu (2011) contend that workplace spirituality involves the effort to find one's ultimate purpose in life, to develop a strong connection to coworkers and other people associated with work, and to have consistency between one's core beliefs and the values of their organization (Mitroff & Denton, 1999). Further, it includes the recognition that there is an inner life that nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work in the context of community (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). The emphases here, in line with the previous understandings, are the relational and social aspects.

As the present study is particularly concerned with the association of spirituality with managerial needs, it could be said that it is more concerned with the consequences (rather than any particular context) and under the individual spirituality stream with possible outcomes for organizational spirituality as well. To understand the consequences of spirituality for managers as individuals, let us examine some possibilities. Many studies related to SRW tend to focus on the impact of various aspects of spirituality upon the individual. For example, Kolodinsky et al (2008) examine the impact of spirituality on employee outcomes such as job involvement, organizational identification, work rewards satisfaction, and organizational frustration; Karakas (2009) examines the impact of spirituality on related aspects such as stress and well-being. A larger number of studies in neighboring disciplines such as psychology and mental health further corroborate the stress reducing impact of spirituality on individuals be they students, professionals or those involved in typically high stress occupations e.g. health care professionals (Hobfoll & Arie, 2012; Holland and Neimeyer, 2005).

Some studies also suggest a link between spiritual practices and increases in brain coherence as well as creativity (Holzel, et al,, 2011; Travis, 1979). A large body of literature further suggests that aspects of spirituality (such as various spiritual practices) can be linked to outcomes such as empathy and connectedness (Delaney, 2005; Holzel,et al., 2011; Koenig, 2008). In a follow up to their study of 1999, Mitroff et al., (2009) further point out that spirituality can result in a leadership and managerial style that

is self-assured and secure as opposed to a style that is focused on the avoidance or anxiety. This reorientation towards the "Self" can lead to a better understanding of others (stakeholders) needs.

Based on these studies, it might be suggested that spirituality, especially when viewed as a whole (belief, practice and universality together) could be positively linked to a number of factors which are related to effective management – stress management, compassion and empathy for co-workers and employees (and other stakeholders), and quite importantly creativity and innovation.

Spirituality, Stress and Management: Managing From a Calm Center

It has been widely agreed that the amelioration of stress could improve a manager's life and general satisfaction (Albrecht, 2010; Kapoor and Khanka, 2013). Moreover, in dealing and reducing stress levels, numerous studies in the areas of health and medicine suggest that meditation can have a positive effect on stress and anxiety related disorders (Miller et al, 1995). A recent meta-analysis published in the Journal of American Medical Association – Internal Medicine suggests that spiritual practices such as meditation can reduce psychological stress at moderate levels (Goyal et al., 2014). This work has also been supported by authors in the medical field such as Sisley et al., (2010) and Schneider et al. (2005) who illustrated how an effective relaxation practice, such as transcendental meditation can reduce stress levels significantly, in the workplace.

Importantly, low levels of stress could very well be related to pertinent managerial outcomes such as better job satisfaction (through need fulfillment); greater involvement through value attainment (Kreitner and Kinicki, 2012) and organizational citizenship (Kutcher et al., 2010). Considering that spirituality and the associated practices with this is said to be inversely related to stress, it behooves interested parties to explore this connection as it could further managerial efficacy and act as a managerial resource.

The interviews conducted for this study were quite conclusive with regards to the efficacy of spirituality in managing stress at the workplace. Participants were unanimous and emphatic that spirituality helped them cope with stressful situations in the workplace. One interviewee suggested that maintaining a spiritual atmosphere in her office not only made her feel more purposeful and "centered" but also allowed others to become more relaxed in her presence. Other participants pointed out that spiritual practices such as the silent intonation of particular chants (mantras) allow them to become more resilient to situations that would otherwise generate considerable irritation. Further, some participants observed that belief in a higher power allowed them to feel less vulnerable in stressful situations by either adapting a "more philosophical attitude" or being comforted by the idea that a higher power would look after their welfare. Overall, it was noticed that spiritual engagement, especially consistent spiritual practice and belief produced fast results in terms of stress reduction.

Spirituality, Connectedness & Management: Transcend the Self to Realize the Self

It seems as though scholars as well as practitioners have forever been making a case for managers to be more concerned with the human and perhaps not so bottom-line oriented aspects of business. Whether it be the classic case of the Hawthorne Studies or the theories of Maslow and McGregor or even the popularly accepted ideas of Carnegie and later, those of Covey; there is an emphasis that management has to be viewed from a holistic perspective that takes into account "soft skills" that can motivate greater performance. Indeed, the latest work by Macky and Sisodia (2013) corroborates the notion of a higher purpose in building strong management teams and businesses.

It is with this in mind that we explore the possibility that spirituality could become a resource for managers to increase performance levels. A number of studies point to spirituality as increasing feelings of compassion, connectedness and empathy towards others. In fact, there is a debate amongst researchers whether connectedness is a definitional aspect of spirituality itself. Some researchers consider this quality as part and parcel of spirituality (Delaney, 2005; Jurkiewicz & Giacalone, 2003; Hicks, 2003) and others consider it more of an outcome of spirituality (Koenig, 2008; Shinde, 2014). Irrespective of these differing views, it is well accepted that spirituality is intimately associated with feelings of empathy and connectedness towards others.

Using the theory of attachment (Ainsworth et al., 2008) as their framework Mitroff et al., (2009) suggest that this is indeed the case because spirituality allows the individual to transcend self-orientation, which is characterized by narrow thinking, self-anxiety and individual aggrandizement and ultimately, function at a more holistic level, characterized by empathy and a genuine desire to understand others. Spirituality therefore, could promote feelings of security and wellbeing that allows managers to broaden their focus and work with lesser regard to individual goals and a greater regard to organizational and stakeholder benefit.

Interviews with participants also lend support to the above conclusions. A majority of those who were interviewed suggested that being spiritually motivated makes them realize that work colleagues can "have their own problems and perspectives" and allows them to be more open to others' ideas and opinions because it is ultimately about "improving oneself" and "not judging others". This non-judgmental attitude underlines the importance of the dimension of universality. Four participants also mentioned that it makes them more caring listeners whereby they are willing and able to focus their attention while communicating with colleagues. This was a rather interesting insight as the ability to focus attention is central to effective listening (Daft, 2014).

Spirituality, Creativity, and Management: Meditate to Create and Innovate

Innovation and creativity can be regarded as two aspects of the same coin, colloquially they may even be considered synonymous. However, technically they are sometimes separated by a fine line – while creativity is the ability to come up with new ideas; innovation can be regarded as the ability to apply new ideas (Scarborough, 2010) Be that as it may, the two qualities are intrinsically related in that one can hardly be innovative if one is not creative. Even if the creativity comes from another source it is still a core requirement for innovation. So what does creativity and innovation have to do with management? And where does spirituality as a management resource fit in?

There is no debate that management in a highly unstable and rapidly changing environment demands innovation and that innovation is the key to social and economic development (Van de Van, 1986). Indeed, numerous high profile cases highlight the danger of not being innovative (Daft, 2014; Gustin, 2013). Whether it is the case of Kodak or Blackberry, both of which are said to have suffered the consequence of being non-innovative, the need for innovation in organizations today can scarcely be overemphasized. And of course, managers are expected to be the drivers of such innovation. From a managerial viewpoint, Van de Van (1986) argues that to understand the process of innovation is to understand the factors that facilitate innovation to include ideas, people, transactions and context over time. Problem is – how can managers act in an innovative manner? And how can they promote innovation? And how can they manage that process successfully?

In Van de Van's article (1986), he outlines 4 factors central in the management of innovation.
1) Human problem of managing attention
2) The process problem of managing good ideas in good currency
3) The structural problem of managing part-whole relationships
4) The strategic problem of institutional leadership.

We propose that perhaps spirituality can provide some answers to two of these core problems associated with developing and managing the process of innovation.

First, Van de van (1986) argues that more successful organizations find it difficult to trigger peoples' action thresholds to pay attention to new ideas, needs and opportunities. Indeed, many organizations are designed to focus on, harvest and protect existing practices thus innovation is lost due *"the limited capacity of human beings to handle complexity and maintain attention"* (pg 594). Many studies since have supported this in concluding that most people have short attention spans and an inability to retain data in the long-term which is reinforced through a culture of distraction in the workplace (Van Dusen, 2008).

However, recent studies suggest that spiritual practices such as meditation can promote brain coherence, which is associated with cerebral cortex stimulation, which in turn is associated with creative

behaviors (Colzeto et al., 2012). Lutz et al., (2008) also illustrated that people who meditate where better at completing tasks, had longer attention spans and better sensory-motor skills. Thus, can the practices of spirituality support the human problem of managing attention?

Secondly, the structural problem of managing part-whole relationships (as outlined by Van De Van, 1986) is a key factor in transforming innovative ideas into realities. Van De Van argues that *"innovation is not an individual activity"* (pg 597) but a complex process involving a proliferation of people. Given this, we reemphasize the importance of spirituality in management connectedness towards others as a way of managing the innovation process in bringing ideas to fruition through connecting people.

Interestingly, in the interviews that were conducted with participants for this study, it seemed that the outcome of creativity was the least affected by spirituality. Only three of the participants were convinced that spirituality (belief, practice and universality) allowed them to be more creative. These were also amongst those who had engaged in spiritual practices for the longest duration (averaging over five years as compared to the overall average of two years), further these participants also emphasized spiritual practice as the most critical of all the dimensions of spirituality. While it is a bit premature to derive any strong conclusions at this stage of the study, the above observation suggests that creativity is related more strongly to the dimension of spiritual practice rather than either belief or universality. More importantly, it is possible that the impact of spiritual practice on creative abilities may take longer to manifest than either stress or empathy.
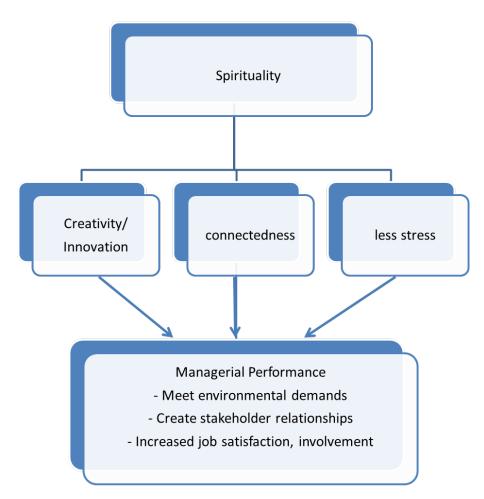
FIGURE 1
A MODEL TO EXAMINE THE SPIRITUAL RESOURCE

Keeping in mind the associations suggested above, the present paper constructs the following model for a managerial style that is rooted in the idea of spirituality. The model suggests the following propositions, which the authors intend to test empirically:

> *Proposition 1: Managers who use spirituality as a resource will show lesser levels of stress.*
> *Proposition 2: Managers who use spirituality as a resource will show greater empathy and connectedness towards stakeholder groups*
> *Proposition 3: Managers who use spirituality as a resource will show greater levels of creativity and innovation.*

IMPLICATIONS AND MODEL EXTENSIONS

These are initial propositions; however, extensions to the model are possible in the foreseeable future. For example, if spirituality is associated with stress reduction, and stress reduction is related to job satisfaction, is there the possibility that spirituality can via the mediating variable of job satisfaction influence organizational or even managerial performance? A similar role may be played by variables such as job involvement and organizational citizenship. Can such relationships be measured via multiple research designs and instruments?
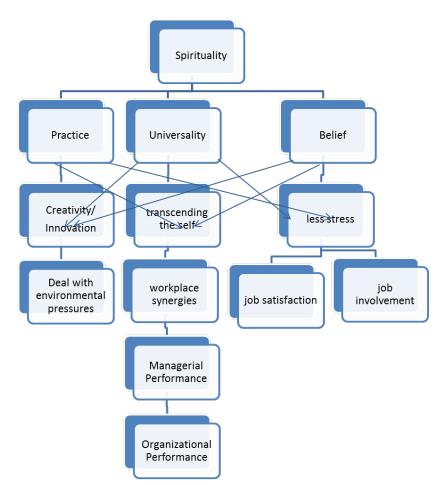
FIGURE 2
EXTENDED MODEL FOR SRW AS A MANAGERIAL RESOURCE

Similarly, what dimensions of spirituality are more or less effective in generating specific outcomes? Most studies emphasize spiritual practices such as meditation, what about other practices such as chanting, prayer, rituals etc.? Is spirituality overall more significant from a resource based view or are individual dimensions of greater value to the organization? Some research suggests that all the three dimensions of spirituality can have an impact on outcomes such as coping behaviors and stress (Koenig, 2000). Figure 2 outlines some of these further implications and avenues for future research.

POTENTIAL METHODS FOR INVESTIGATION

To further the present paper and to test its proposed models, a number of methods could be used.

Method 1
Participants: Managers and supervisors from multiple organizations that can be divided into two groups:
a) Organizations that can be considered "spiritual" based on their mission statements (should correspond to the definition of Spirituality as used in the article), and
b) Organizations that can be considered as "spiritually-neutral".

Each group would take a survey for each of the variables involved Spirituality (independent) and stress, creativity, and connectedness (dependent). Testing would involving measuring and comparing mean scores of each group (spiritually committed group vs. spiritually neutral group)? Comparison of mean scores for each variable can be conducted via an independent samples T-test. A correlation analysis can also be conducted to see if there are significant correlations between the variables.

Method 2
Participants: Managers and supervisors from multiple organizations
Again, subjects will be required to take measurement surveys for each of the variables outlined above. A regression analysis can then be conducted to check if dependent variables are correlated to the independent variable of spirituality.

Method 3
For testing the extended model, figure 3, a path analysis can be conducted to analyze the role of mediating variables such as job satisfaction. The subjects will again remain managers and supervisors from numerous organizations.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this paper, we have presented some initial thoughts on how spirituality can be used as a managerial resource to reduce stress, support the development of connectedness and improve innovation and creativity. In developing this work and testing of our proposed hypothesis, we believe that we will provide new evidence in the field of management as it is related to spirituality and religiosity in the workplace.

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