



AN EXPLORATORY ANALYSIS OF DEFINITIONS AND EFFECTS OF PRACTICING SPIRITUALITY AT WORKPLACE FROM THE STANDING POINTS OF SCHOOL MANAGERS

Abdul Ghani Kanesan ABDULLAH[†]

School of Educational Studies Universiti Sains Malaysia, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia

Aziah ISMAIL

School of Educational Studies Universiti Sains Malaysia, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

In response to noticeable increase in publications and conferences on "Spirituality in the Workplace", the primary endeavor of this study is to investigate definitions and the effects of practicing "spirituality at the workplace" in the context of Malaysia's education system from the perspective of the school managers. Data for this study was collected by using semi-structured open-ended interviews from a total of 10 school administrative personal or the principal (5 females, 5 males) from public secondary schools. All selected participants were involved administering school management duties with more than 10 years of experience. All the interviews were audi-taped and transcribed, then thematic analysis method as suggested by (Miles and Huberman, 1984) was used to examine the data. The findings of this study revealed that the respondents have discovered thematically 3 different perspectives as been explained by (Fleming, 2000). Meanwhile, members of the school who practice spirituality is believed to strive to achieve self enhancement, besides contributing to the development of the community and the organization. Finally implications and contributions of the study were also discussed.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the efforts to achieve the status of a progressive country, Malaysia has gone through a transformation through the implementation of Education Development Plan 2006-2010 to enhance the quality of the current educational system through a contemporary effort. This is parallel to the statement by Ray and Rinzler (1993), "Throughout the world, people in business field including

[†] Corresponding author
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owners, managers, and employees are changing the way they think and work. They are engaged in a transformation, that some have said is as great as any in history". In context with this, Conger (1994) asserts that there is a current surge in the search for spirituality in the workplace and in our daily lives. Reflecting this sentiment there has been a noticeable increase in publications and conferences on "Spirituality at the Workplace" and spirituality in daily life (Lee and Zemke, 1993; Conger, 1994; Biberman and Whitty, 1997). Thus, in response to this growing attention, the primary endeavor of this study is to investigate definitions and the effects of practicing "spirituality at the workplace" in the context of Malaysia's education system from the perspective of the school managers.

This is because the school management needs to have spirituality integration in the work place as this practice will boost humanitarian aspects in many organizations (Hicks, 2002; Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003; Bygrave and MacMillan, 2008). Although the success in this practice may focus on profit organization, but the need of having these practices in workplaces especially in the context of the education organization cannot be exempted (Galen and West, 1995; Hicks, 2002; Bygrave and MacMillan, 2008).

2. SPIRITUALITY-CONCEPT

Topics concerning spirituality often attract the attention but the main issue is the difficulty in defining the word "spirituality" (Harward, 2002; Hicks, 2002). Nevertheless, there are a variety of suggestions concerning this word. The word originates from the Latin word, "spiritus", which means "breath" (Kale and Shrivastava, 2003). Breath is a prominent element in life, therefore, similar to spirituality, it is essential to life.

"Spirituality" is related to sacred matters, those with religion values (Hicks, 2002). Religion is an important part of life to an individual. Although people may have different beliefs, spirituality can be connected according to one's beliefs (Neal and Bennet, 2000)

From the organization aspect, spirituality is often linked with a connection that exists among the members of an organization (Galen and West, 1995). Meanwhile, Kinjerski and Skrypnek (2004) suggested that spirituality is the organization's culture and habit that encourages autonomy, beliefs, family values, helpfulness, job acknowledgement, innovation and justice. Spirituality is also related to an individual's practice of noble values in workplaces or the ways the structure of an organization assist in employees' spiritual growth (Caciope, 2000; Neal and Bennet, 2000; Kinjerski and Skrypnek, 2004) Therefore, it can be concluded that the spirituality concept is closely associated with either individuals or an organization.

Meanwhile, Fleming (2000) and Ashmos (2000) described spirituality in the context of management as employee's recognition towards the intrinsic needs of personal development influences the definition of job in the context of a community. Therefore, the employees who are the members of the community will make the mission and vision of the organization immensely personal goal that encourages them to strive in achieving these goals. Hence, the aims of the organization are shared together by the members of the community (Ashmos and Duchon, 2000; Fleming, 2000; Milliman et al., 2002).

In short, spirituality is a topic that can be related to the entire human's life aspects. The definition of the word spirituality is varied in different perspectives, yet, the explanation of this word from the educational community still lacks exposition.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This research aims to analyze and explain the definition of spirituality in workplaces and to trace its practices in the context of education management.

4. METHOD

4.1. Participants

A total of 10 school administrative personal or the principal (5 females, 5 males) from public secondary schools, participated in this study. The Purposive sampling was used to identify 10 school management officers who currently in service and involved as school administrators in Penang Island in Peninsular Malaysia. All selected participants were involved administering school management duties with more than 10 years of experience.

4.1. Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected through face-to-face interviews with all the participants. Each individual were first asked of the questions as follows, "What does spirituality in the workplace means to you"? They were also asked to describe on the question: "What are the effects of practicing spirituality in your workplace"? Interviews were audio-taped and transcribed.

Semi-structured interactive interviews were used for this exploratory and descriptive qualitative study. Thematic analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1984) was used to examine the data. Coding (R1 to R10) was conducted on transcribed interviews that described participants' experience.

4.2. Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the soundness of qualitative research research and is generally judged in terms of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Miles and Huberman, 1984). Credibility was established through researcher triangulation and member checking. With the intent of conforming categories and themes, separate debriefing sessions were held with the participants. Categories and interpretations were also shared with participants to ensure that their experience was captured. Dependability was enhanced through use of audio-taping and transcribing the interviews verbatim, and code the transcripts. Transferability was established through inclusion of "thick descriptions" from the data which will enable the reader to determine the applicability of findings.

5. FINDINGS

5.1. The Definition of Spirituality in School

a. As a religious matter

The findings revealed that each respondents has their own ideas concerning spirituality in the school, but there are a few similarities in their views. There were respondents who link spirituality

with religion, and the idea of divinity. This can be seen through the explanation from respondent R8, "Spirituality is the issue of matter and spirit. Matter is the outward form while spirit is related to the relationship between our spirit and God. In other words, complete surrender unto God. We serve with an attitude for God that He is constantly watching over us." There were also respondents who relate work place spirituality with one's principles and beliefs in life. Respondent R12 said that, "For Muslims, their faith in is God, so do the other religions. These beliefs urge us to practice noble values in life. Everyone should have their own beliefs to do good". While respondent R2 and R3 linked the concept of workplace spirituality with theological theories. R2 stated that "if we were to discuss about workplace spirituality, we need to first examine the beliefs' values. We need to be sincere and I understand spirituality.. in the workplace." Meanwhile, respondent R3 said that "spirituality is energy. It is about how passionate we are in work and understanding the meaning of the work itself. Therefore, the job one has is no longer treated as a source of income but a positioning of faith that one needs to do it with full passion."

b. As a Workplace Psychology

Findings also revealed that respondents relate spirituality with work psychology, eg: cheerful when working, high work enthusiasm and motivation and intrinsic feeling during work. This is clear when R10 stated spirituality in workplace as "... a force where one understands the meaning of working and is passionate about it." While respondent R7 on the other hand mentioned that spirituality is "an intrinsic feeling where one feels a sense of satisfaction that generates a cheerful working environment". R7 continued by saying that "Satisfaction means working voluntarily without being forced and not hoping for reward". According to R6, spirituality is the motivation to work and propelling one to do their job with commitment, "... work motivation. It is to have satisfaction and a sense of pride in school though with a high workload".

c. As a Personal and Intrinsic Motivation

Spirituality in work place is often related to one's character which causes their work to have a certain meaning to these individuals. R4 stated that "spirituality is linked with a person's character where there are good experiences and work means something important to the employees. Good experiences cause workers not only to treat work as a place of income but a place to enhance and provide working satisfaction". In this context, they do not only view teaching as their only responsibility, without minding whether students experience real learning, but they will do more in their position, with commitment and dedication. This directly boosts their performance. As mentioned by R2, spirituality is "an energy, for example, a deep love and appreciation towards the school which becomes the driving force for teachers to serve without burning out".

Futhermore, research findings also indicate that if intrinsic characters of an individual are skillfully integrated into the internal school factors, this will create a harmonious working environment. This is mentioned by R6, that "...spirituality is more towards the intrinsic characters of an individual in schools and they are integrated with the internal factors of the school, a harmonious working surrounding can be generated. The workplace i felt that it's the daily duties in school. To me, the relationship with the administrative team, teachers, staff and students should be examined to ensure a more positive enthusiasm and energy".

Spirituality was also defined as a dedication of spirit and soul towards one's job. To respondents, working is not just a mere career, but it is to do it with full commitment and zeal while take great concern in every duty. R13 mentioned that "...spirituality in workplace means the presence of both physical and emotional sense, to dedicate all aspects of a person, the heart.. the feeling towards the workplace, as how people would say it, putting your heart and soul into your work".

d. As a Relationship between an Individual and the Organization

Spirituality is related to an individual's relationship with an organization that concerns him. A good alliance between an organization and an individual will produce work pleasure which helps to elevate one's working performances. According to R17, "...spirituality or spirit in the workplace means working in a group within an organization. The values of an organization's structure that promote employee culture can be viewed as workplace spirituality. The experiences of working process that connects people around and the excitement resulting form the relationship.. cooperation, taking part and actively involving oneself to a job." The findings are supported by respondent R18 who stated that, "The enthusiasm in the workplace has connections with individuals who are a part of an organization, in other words, we can say that, the presence of enthusiasm in workplace denotes the presence of working pleasure where people can practice values such as mutual respect, cooperation and unity. In short, we can feel a sense of pleasure in an organization such as in schools".

5.2. The Effects of Spirituality at Workplace Practices in Schools

The research findings showed that the spirituality practices in schools has a positive impact towards the the school management department in their efforts of increasing the school's efficacy. This is reflected in the research findings that spirituality practices in the workplace can enhance and strengthen the administration and management of the school. In fact, the rapport between schools and parents can be enhanced. This was as mentioned by R7, "the impact that I'm referring to is the one that can enhance the relationship between schools and residents, the local community, parents, besides enhancing the school's performances from every aspect, eg: leadership, finance, sports management, learning fields and so forth". R4 also supports the statement that with the presence of spirituality practices in schools, the school management will be more effective, "...when administrative procedures are running smoothly, teachers will be able to teach in a cheerful and enjoyable surrounding and encourage them as a teacher, birthing confidence among parents to send their children to the particular school

Besides, the impact of spirituality in workplace towards the school's efficacy aims to create a sense of satisfaction and sincerity towards the body of the school. Job satisfaction is generated when all the staff and the teachers conduct a job cooperatively. Besides, sincerity in working is also obtained when individuals are able to do what they prefer. For example, in leading a club in school, the principal will need to ask for opinions from teachers concerning their decision of being appointed as the advisor for the club. In this manner, the teachers and the principal will be tolerable to each other to ensure an exciting and enjoyable working experience. According to R3, "... When a teacher or a student understands the purpose of his responsibility, he will focus in that direction.

Whatever jobs that they may receive, it will bring them pleasure and satisfaction. If students or teachers treat his workplace as a miserable place to be in, they cannot focus in their responsibility. If we fail to see the excitement in our responsibility, we will not be able to see the values behind them.” This statement is supported by respondent R6 who stated that, “we can help each other through thick or thin. And thirdly, I believe that we need to be an example. Discard resentment and unhealthy competition between colleagues. In other words, we need to accept our friends as who they are, where this will help us to achieve satisfaction in our work”.

Cooperation is also a result of spirituality practices in schools. With the cooperation between teachers, matters can be resolved efficiently. The cooperation among teachers also ensures a healthy collaboration during group work. During an interview, respondent R3 stated that “collaboration is a form of responsibility and trust towards other people in carrying out duties according to the commitment to work in groups or with colleagues. There are a difference in opinions and beliefs in an organization. Therefore, these differences, in a positive aspect, are to develop a group’s potentials. This encourages an unbiased and equal relationship in the workplace and also helps to calm situations if arguments occur”. This is supported by respondent R5 who stated that “when there is a sense of spirituality, it can generate cooperation, collaboration in all activities in school, propelling the school towards excellence”.

The spirituality experiences in schools also motivate teachers to carry out their responsibilities as assigned. Teachers will be motivated to produce a creative and innovative teaching and learning experience. They will also give their full attention and ideas to ensure the success of teaching and learning because the sense of comfort in their workplace. With this, the teaching process and the additional workload, eg: as club advisors and miscellaneous duties will not be an issue and a burden for them. This is as stated by respondent R8 that “.. if everyone is willing to tolerate, cooperate and be positive, daily lives in school will go on smoothly. Teachers will have a high level of self motivation, confidence and enthusiasm. A high level of job satisfaction brings success where students will also be able to learn in a conducive and harmonious environment”.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The research findings showed that the respondents have a variety of views concerning the definition of spirituality in schools from the aspect of school management. Nevertheless, when the findings are arranged thematically, it was discovered there are 3 different perspectives as been explained by Fleming (2000). First of all, the definition of spirituality in schools is defined as a certain feeling that gives enthusiasm and passion to an action. In this matter, it is clear that spirituality is closely related to feelings, and these feelings do not only bridge connections among people but also influence a person’s enthusiasm, passion, and their noble, godly values (Fleming, 2000; Hicks, 2002). Meanwhile, the second definition of spirituality in schools is the employee’s recognition towards the developing internal needs and this expansion has influence the meaning of work in a community context. The employees who are the members of the community in an organization will make the organization’s mission and vision as their own and the entire community will be encouraged to achieve the aims of the organization. Therefore, the organization’s goal becomes a shared aim (Ashmos and Duchon, 2000; Fleming, 2000; Milliman et al., 2002). The third definition of spirituality in schools are the actions and experiences that exist

through the awareness of being a role model and to possess characteristics and values related to personal and life principles, or anything that is able to bring forth positive results (Burack, 1999; Cashin, 2000).

The research findings proved that the spirituality at workplace practices in schools can assist individuals in developing their potentials exceeding the boundaries in the aspects of creativity and capabilities (Krishnakumar and Neck, 2002); to create an enjoyable working environment (Fleming, 2000); and to enhance self satisfaction according to Krishnakumar and Neck (2002). Besides, spirituality practices in schools are also capable of generating an individual's commitment, where they view themselves as a part of the organization through creating a "trustful climate" (Burack, 1999; Fleming, 2000; Krishnakumar and Neck, 2002). This is a catalyst to enhance work productivity. Meanwhile, spirituality practices are also discovered to build rapport among the school bodies, regardless of each weaknesses, skin colour, origin, or gender (Neck and Milliman, 1994). In fact, it can create an amicable surrounding where all members of the organization are accepting though they share different culture and backgrounds.

As a conclusion, the definition of spirituality in schools is the organization's culture to encourage autonomy, trust, family values, helpfulness, job recognition, innovation and justice. Meanwhile, members of the school who practice spirituality not only view their job as a calling from God, but will also strive to achieve self enhancement, besides contributing to the development of the community and the organization.

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