

# ETHICAL BEHAVIOR THROUGH THE LENS OF WORKPLACE SPIRITUALITY: A REVIEW AGENDA

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**Abstract** *Workplace spirituality has now become an integral part of behavioral practices. Over the last decade, researchers have been taking interest in understanding workplace spirituality in organizations. The frequent discussion about spirituality at the workplace has also fortified the perception of ethical behavior among individuals. Ethical behavior among employees has been widely advanced by the spiritual values, which affect the work environments and organizational culture at large. This study reflects upon the relationship and interconnectedness between spirituality and ethical behavior in organizations. It also aims at suggesting ways as to how spirituality can be a driving factor for ethical behavior among individuals in organizations. Extensive literature review on the study has been conducted to gain insights on workplace spirituality and ethics. The study inferred that integrating various factors like leadership, culture, organizational citizenship behavior in the work environment might augment spirituality and ethical behavior at workplace.*

**Keywords** *Workplace Spirituality, Ethics, Organizational Culture, Values*

## INTRODUCTION

The complexities of modern business environment imposed a greater challenge to the organization's morality. The increasing consumerism & globalization has created an aggressive work environment. All aspects of human behavior like honesty, trust, integrity, commitment, & truthfulness are affected mostly. Number of layoffs, recession, economic slowdown, diversity and disparity in access & distribution of resources, cut-throat competition, and constant pressure to perform at any cost creates an unavoidable challenge to organizational & individual ethical practices.

Despite the formal policy guidelines of organization regulate the ethical system, unethical practices in the corporate are strongly prevalent. Numerous corporate scams and frauds exemplify this. Now, the question arises as to what can be done to induce the ethical environment in an organization. The researchers have conducted various studies to answer this question. One of the emerging philosophies is workplace spirituality. It helps both the organization & individuals to face & overcome the work-related challenges in aggressive & hybrid environment. It helps the individual to gain the deeper satisfaction in terms of wholeness & interconnectedness of self to the organizational values. It helps them to introspect themselves & allows them to get alienated towards shared & agreed work setups, moral & fair behavior, allegiance to code of conducts.

Hence, this study tries to find out the relationship between workplace spirituality & ethics and a medium through which spiritually driven ethical system could be facilitated in organizations.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Meaning of Workplace Spirituality

Academia and organizational behavioral theorist and practitioners have shown a remarkable interest in last two decades in workplace spirituality (Cavanaugh, 1999; Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003; Murphy et al., 1995; Tischler, 1999). The reason is that organizations are now opening their doors for a relatively new dimension, which has little to do with traditional practices and procedures of work and more with meaning at work and spiritual connection (Armour, 1998; Galen & West, 1995; Hua 1999; Lancaster, 1995). The term "workplace spirituality" can be interpreted in two ways. One interpretation may suggest that workplace spirituality is about facilitating the people's experience at work, sense of community and belongingness and completeness at work and workplace (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003). Another interpretation of the term "workplace spirituality" suggests that workplace spirituality involves employee's experiences of workplace spirituality by aligning it with organizational values. While studying workplace spirituality, Milliman

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et al. (2003) had similar findings as they noted that workplace spirituality involves an employee's experiencing sense of meaning in work, sense of connectedness with others at work, and an experience of alignment with the organization's mission and purpose. Similarly, Ashmos and Duchon (2000) suggested that a workplace where people experience joy and meaning in their work is a place where spirituality is more observable compared to a place where people do not experience joy and meaning in their work, that is, a workplace in which people see themselves as part of a trusting community, where they experience personal growth as a part of their work community, and where they feel valued and supported would be a workplace in which spirituality thrives.

Gibbons (2000) described the workplace spirituality in terms of held values by people at work. Neck and Milliman (1994) also have the similar idea as they define workplace spirituality as an expression of one's desires to find meaning, worth and purpose in work lives and is a process of living out one's set of deeply held personal values. Dehler and Welsh (1994) suggests that workplace spirituality is an individual's inner source of inspiration leading it to excellence. Mitroff and Denton (1999) defined spirituality as a sense of engagement and joy with surroundings. Therefore, spirituality generally viewed as some internal substance, belief, attitude, or emotion, which influence people's behavior as suggested by Moore and Casper (2006).

There are two key elements of workplace spirituality identified by Fry (2003) in one's life: (a) a sense of calling, and (b) a faith of having role beyond purpose at work. Theorist like Kriger and Hanson (1999), Reave (2005) recognise certain values which can be achieved by having high sense of calling and worth in work. Values like high moral and behavioral standards, trust, selflessness, forgiveness, kindness, integrity, empathy, honesty, patience, courage, trust, and humility are considered as essential requisites for facilitating workplace spirituality in organizations.

Thompson (2001) opined differently and has thrust on feeling rather than the experience, while discussing workplace spirituality thus viewed it as a phenomenon of individual level. Sanders et al. (2004) expresses it as the extent within which the organization facilitates sense of meaning at work and interconnectedness with others. Sheep (2004) defines workplace spirituality through four components: self-workplace integration, meaning in work, transcendence of self, and personal growth of one's inner life at work.

Managing ethical behavior is no doubt a critical social problem for business organizations.

## Meaning of Ethics

Conventional studies on ethics at work have thrust upon the nature of transgression of one's ethics, their situational behavioral components and the transformation of these into workplace excellence (Bass et al., 1999; Cassell et al., 1997; Jamal & Bowie, 1995; Satterwhite et al., 2000; Somers, 2001; Trevino, 1986; Wyld and Jones, 1997;). DeGeorge (1982) defined ethics as the study of morality and immorality. Marques (2005) recognized it as a domain dealing with good and bad related to moral duties and obligations. There was a normative perspective mainly concerned with "constructing and justifying the moral standards and codes that one ought to follow" in early theories of ethics (Vitell, 1986). Thiroux (2004) explained ethics as study of morality and conduct in terms of right & wrong.

Ethics, according to DeGeorge (1982), is the study of morality and significantly argued that "morality is a term used to cover those practices and activities that are considered importantly right and wrong, the rules which govern those activities and the values that are imbedded, fostered, or pursued by those activities and practices". Similarly, Taylor (1975) defines ethics as an "inquiry into the nature and grounds of morality", where morality means "moral judgments, standards, and rules of conduct". Vitell (1986) applied Taylor's definition to define marketing ethics as "an inquiry into the nature and grounds of moral judgments, standards, and rules of conduct relating". Beauchamp and Bowie (1983) define ethics as the "inquiry into theories of what is good and evil and into what is right and wrong, and thus is inquiry into what we ought and ought not to do".

## Determinants of Ethics

Giocalone and Jurkiewicz (2003) stated that ethics and related issues at workplace are critical but highly ignored. Nowadays, many academicians and behavioral theorist are showing great interest on the effects of contemporary variables on ethics and ethics related behavior (Ford & Richardson, 1994; Jones & Kavanagh, 1996; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005; Robertson & Ross, 1995; Trevino, 1986). There are significant practical and relevant challenges while addressing issues related to choices one has when faced with ethical problems (Jones, 1991; Trevino, 1986). The ethics can be classified into external ethics & internal ethics. Ethical choices consisting and coinciding with the consequence approach thrusting the impact of firms' ethical choice behavior on external organizational climate are external ethics (Zadek, Pruzan, & Evans, 1997). Internal

ethics primarily concerns with choices what people at work have at individual level affecting attitude and behavior.

The review of concerned literature of ethics and related behavioral system reveals that explanation of ethics in terms of good & bad, right & wrong is not appropriate, as it does not reflect the morality. Being ethically right or good does not necessarily makes you morally correct. Ethics in term of right/good or wrong/bad can be highly subjective & vary in depending on the situations; this variability can cause the reliability & validity of the Ethical System. This might help to achieve the purpose of profit maximization but certainly not the purpose of wealth maximization. Hence, a revision is required on the defining part of the ethics. On the basis of the researches, it may be concluded that word “ETHICS” stands for Equality, Transparency, Honesty, Integrity, Commitment & Standard while the word “ETHICAL” stands for Equal & Empathic, Transparent, Honest, Integrity, Conviction, Authentic & Legitimate codes of conduct. These are the values underlying the essence of ethics & ethical value system. These are meant to be balanced so that a fairness can be achieved. This fairness in action will induce the ethical system, which is induced & corrected by the moral aspects. By defining the ethics & ethical system in term of fair & unfair, we can generalize them & they will helps to achieve the purpose of wealth maximization in terms of adding value & credibility & terms in the organization. Now, a key question arises as how to transform ethics into ethical system. According to past researches, workplace spirituality can transform the organizations into ethical organizations.

## Workplace Spirituality and Ethics

There is an emergence of relatively new discipline in academia dealing with workplace spirituality and its impact on ethics. Some theorist opined that workplace spirituality and ethics are same but they are quite different, although it is easier for a spiritually driven person to be ethical at workplace. Workplace spirituality encompasses the similar topics, which are included and very important in ethics: character and giving oneself for the benefit of others. Many practices and processes in modern management related to workplace spirituality are pragmatically adopted from leading ethical theories and moral principles such as the discipline of “dealing with others as you would have them deal with you”; the discipline of “balancing our work, personal, family, community, and work responsibilities”; the discipline of “working to make the system work”; and the discipline of “engaging in personal and professional development” (Pierce, 1999). Bond (1996) and Teichman (1996) argue that ethics at work are important and essential

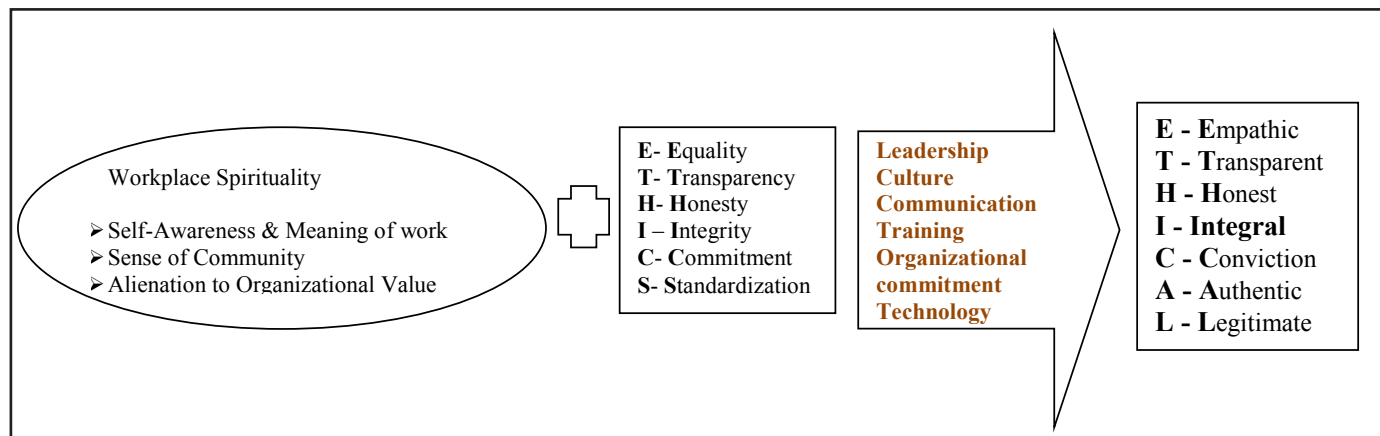
but not sufficient component for integrating faith at work. Ethics is the answer to the question dealing with morally correct behavior such as what is the correct way of doing things. It is about justifying those sorts of rules, principles and processes that help to assure morally good as well as correct decisions. To this extent, it employs arguments and theories to convince others that certain claims are the best ones to hold. Thus, ethics in the light of aforesaid argument must be viewed as a pathway for behaving in governed and prescribed manner by the organization. Ethics are usually described and put forward as code of behavioral conduct by the organization without taking care of the dilemmas that might be faced by the new employee. Rather, they are imposed and the employee must have to agree with them. While at workplace, every employee has a reasonable understanding about the behaviors who are morally acceptable and what behaviors are morally inadmissible; however, in between these two choices, there lies individual’s own workplace spirituality determining and governing his understanding, interpretation, acceptance and deliverance ethical behavior and choices. It also could be taken as an issue of personal choice (Hitt, 1990; Lewis, 1990). It is important to understand that in contemporary world, trends in workplace spirituality are quite different from the concept of ethics evolving with time. It is now oriented towards four key trends: it responds to life—to its beauty and its injustices—and leads to action; it looks to the universe—the whole world becomes a part of the spiritual person; it is responsive and responsible to the poor and oppressed; and it is socially oriented. Not only the persons (coworkers), but also the society in which a person is living (the organization) is important (Missinne, 1990).

Workplace spirituality is a governing philosophy & the degree of self-awareness, sense of community & meaning of work constitute a regulative ideal that may be explained as normative disposition which governs the action of individual (Oakley & Cocking, 2001). An employee has certain conception, an understanding of correctness & a tendency of not to conflict with the standards. It helps to develop & evaluate the individual’s workplace spirituality. It helps to gain the calling (the meaning of works) & membership (the sense of community) & hence can be a potent source of employee’s ethical well-being (Duncheon & Plowmann, 2005). Workplace spirituality incorporated by spiritual values; virtues can have positive ethical impact in an organizational context, which helps in improved performance. The essence of workplace spirituality reflects the moral values and actions to the extent, as they resemble the purpose the morality. It is the assurance that spiritually driven individuals are not governed by their ego in the workplace. They constantly strive towards the greater meaning & sense of connectedness in their doing at workplace (Mitroff & Denton, 1999).

## CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF SPIRITUALLY DRIVEN ETHICAL BEHAVIOR

The extensive review of literature leads to the development of a conceptual model explaining how spirituality and ethics augmented with various factors lead to ethical behavior in the

workplace. As depicted in Figure 1, the model explains how self-awareness and meaning of work, sense of community and alienation to organizational value when combined with equality, transparency, honesty, integrity, commitment and standardization leads to ethical behavior. The model further elaborates the mediating role of leadership, culture, communication, training, organizational commitment and technology in facilitating the ethical behavior in organizations.



**Fig. 1: Conceptual Model of Spiritually Driven Ethical Behavior**

Factors mentioned in Figure 1 augmenting ethical behavior in an organization is elaborated as follows:

**Leadership:** Leaders in the organizations are considered a primary and key influencer and facilitators of ethical and moral norms by established rules and procedures governing people at work (Denhardt, 1988; Vallance, 1998). Research has demonstrated that the primary influence of leaders on ethical behavior is to lower employees' ethical standards (Jurkiewicz & Thompson, 1999; Victor & Cullen, 1988), while the impetus to resist such pressures and the decision to raise one's ethical standards remains a personal choice (Jurkiewicz & Thompson, 1999). That true transformational leadership is by its very nature ethical (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Kanungo, 2001). The coupling of ethical leadership and managing support is more efficient and effective in fostering an ethical climate rather than implementing trainings and code of conducts for ethics. (Jose & Thibodeaux, 1999; Paine, 1997; Treviño et al., 2005). Ethical leaders communicate the importance of ethics to subordinates. Morgan (1993) found in his study on ethics and leadership, which involved 385 managers and 1965 raters, including superiors, subordinates, and peers, that perceptions of ethics are significantly and positively correlated with perceptions of leadership for all three subgroups of others.

**Organizational Culture -** Barnard (1968) and Jurkiewicz and Thompson (1999) argued that an ethical climate encompassing established standards for ethical consideration at workplace can be facilitated by structured organizational culture, which can provide the steadiness and sense of continuity during the turbulent time as the organizations are susceptible to changes. In such time, a suitable organizational culture fosters the faith and loyalty in ethical conducts and moral norms of an employee. Sims (2000) said that those organizational cultures that were based on values and underlying assumptions of dishonesty, deceit, favoritism, and greed (e.g., Enron, WorldCom and Tyco International) could lead top managers to make choices that were injurious to employees and key stakeholders. This can provoke employees to go beyond those ethical barriers. When altruistic values of respect, fairness, honesty, care and compassion become integral parts of an organization's culture, a culture of trust emerges. The Container Store, Stride-Rite and Johnson & Johnson, among others, have such cultural values. Once formed, a corporate culture is tenacious and difficult to change. Such type of culture tends to go into survival mode and engage in rationalization and denial in the face of external threats and internal failures.

Communication - Theorist like Barnard (1968) and Jurkiewicz (2002) have suggested that there must be some informal codes and norms of ethics at work in order to address the ethics-related circumstantial dilemmas of people at work. Kramer and Messick (1996) who gave the similar notion has objectively supported that there must be an existence of reliable and consistent code of ethics and moral behavior and internal level necessarily of informal nature leading to the resolution of situational ethical duality (Cooper, 1998). In other words, “ethical managers are needed to walk the talk” resulting significant outcomes in terms of efficient modeled role behavior and perceived integrity and conduct at work (Gini, 1997).

Training – Both formal and informal ethics programs and behaviors can also be induced, foster and stabilized by consistency and continuity between framed institutional policies and actions through intensive training. Open-box discussion on the ethical issues in the organization and ethical leadership can be facilitated through programmed behavior (Trevino et al., 1999). Organizations are to invest in ethics training programs to teach management how to improve ethical behavior. Organizations often focus training efforts on employees and focus less attention on training managers at different levels of an organization (Weaver, Treviño, & Cochran, 1999). Training topics could include things like communicating the importance of ethics, rewarding and supporting employees who behave ethically, and serving as ethical role models. In year 1998, Miami-Dade County made it compulsory to its entire employee to undergo ethics training after being hit by a series of scandals. The ethics training incorporated various facets like guideline for communication with lobbyist, accepting gifts, insider business, conflict of interest, procurement policies, etc., by distributing the pamphlets and manuals, which see such a conduct as less the function of individual, psychological disposition and more the result of institutional dysfunction (Garcia-Zamor, 2001).

Organizational Commitment - Employees’ sense of belongingness at work and ethics are closely related and can be evident through ethical climate (Trevino et al., 1998) and ethical values (Sharma et al., 2009). According to the social identity theory, (Tajfel, 1974) strongly argued that organizational commitment significantly impacts the self-concept and the identity of people at work; hence, they firmly value and feel sense of pride in their association resulting as an increase in their commitment and loyalty both upward and downward with the organization (Jacinto & Carvalho, 2009). Rupp, Ganapathi, Aguilera, & Williams (2006) and Simons & Roberson (2003) suggested that ethical norms at internal level are deeply associated with collective commitment of employee at work and they perceive internal practices and policies of ethics fair and just when they are aligned with

these. This helps them to get an impression that they will have minimal anxiety and uncertainty as legal and ethical standards are transparent and just hence will strive more towards ethical practice. Gong et al. (2010) described it as a process generating the collective relationships of social interaction and exchanges arising due to the facilitation of internal ethics and a just work environment. Higher levels of ethical climate that emphasize principles, such as company rules and professional codes, are more likely to lead to the development of a relational contract. The most productive relationship consists of a caring climate, where the management fulfills employees’ needs, promotes employees’ best interests, and values employees’ contributions; in this type of environment, employees are likely to reciprocate with morally good and correct behavior. Deshpande (1996) found that managers who believed that their organization had a caring climate perceived a strong positive link between success and ethical behavior. Mertzman and Madsen (1992) pointed out “if the opportunity presents itself and the risk of not getting caught is low, if the organization does not foster an ethical climate, then chances are fairly good that corruption will take place”.

Technology - Bakardjieva and Feenberg (2001) argued that technology and technological development are in the constant state of flux and seem likely to continue into the foreseeable future; hence, ethical considerations and responses to the changes should be adapted accordingly. Flexibility is therefore extremely important in any ethical framework constructed for organization (Bruckman, 2001; Ess, 2001; Herring, 1996). Technology is the key for open-source ethics enabling specific, measurable and time-bounded ethical framework. Nonetheless, issues of privacy, confidentiality, informed consent and appropriation of individuals’ life stories will continue to require urgent attention in the context of technological intervention in ethical system (Bakardjieva & Feenberg, 2001; Sharf, 1999).

Spiritually driven individual strongly believes that it is correct to live as per moral value system. This notion is quite similar to the Aristotelian view, which states, “a virtuous man perceives that it is worthwhile to live according to moral values”. Here, emphasis on morality is important as it contributes to the perfection or flourishing of the individual as human or complete being (Guardini, 1999).

## CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The present study revolves around the theoretical frameworks of spirituality and ethical behavior in organizations. It is evident from the study that workplace spirituality and ethics have significant relationship with each other as

former transforms the latter into an ethical system, which is more meaningful. Workplace spirituality helps to foster a spiritually driven ethical behavior system. The meaning at work and sense of calling helps the employee to get better understanding of the demands of the job and the constraints and helps him to get rid of the dilemmas concerned with ethical choice. It also helps employees to act in right way in conflicting situations. However, workplace spirituality cannot foster ethical system on its own and requires the mediation of various factors for example, leadership, organizational culture, commitment, etc., as previously mentioned in the model.

Thus, the present study concludes that workplace spirituality and ethical behavior can be augmented by different factors in the work environment. This study is limited to the data retrieved for the study in this discipline. However, further research may be undertaken based on empirical study, which would clarify the concept. Future researchers may undertake the empirical studies to validate the conceptual model of workplace spirituality and ethics given in the present paper. The concept may be tested in self-managed teams dominating the contemporary business scenario.

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