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Abstract
During the last two decades, interest in the field of workplace spirituality has continued to grow. However, will workplace spirituality be another management fad? Human Relations, Organisational Development, Total Quality Management and Quality of Working Life were all more deeply researched than spirituality at work. In this paper, I discuss the relevance of Institutional Theory to examine the faddish nature of the workplace spirituality discourse. With the increase in 'spiritual talk', I argue that a controversial issue is how we could ascertain the extent to which organisations are seeking legitimacy rather than a genuine commitment to an authentic spirituality.

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WORKPLACE SPIRITUALITY: ANOTHER MANAGEMENT FAD?

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ABSTRACT

During the last two decades, interest in the field of workplace spirituality has continued to grow. However, will workplace spirituality be another management fad? Human Relations, Organisational Development, Total Quality Management and Quality of Working Life were all more deeply researched than spirituality at work. In this paper, I discuss the relevance of Institutional Theory to examine the faddish nature of the workplace spirituality discourse. With the increase in 'spiritual talk', I argue that a controversial issue is how we could ascertain the extent to which organisations are seeking legitimacy rather than a genuine commitment to an authentic spirituality.

I. INTRODUCTION

In 2000, the Internet bookseller, Amazon, set up a subsection of books devoted to Spirituality and Religion in the Workplace. The rate of management books published on spirituality and religion has increased exponentially over the past 10 years with similar growth in directly related publications of a scholarly nature (Joseph, 2002). More recently, the WorldCom, Enron and other corporate scandals around the globe have also added to the growth in the interest of spirituality. As a result, the role of the business schools in turning out Chief Executive Officers with an overriding drive to increase profit has been criticised. Stronger emphasis on business ethics and values in business pedagogy has been called for.

In response, many academic institutions have launched courses on spirituality and management. In the United Kingdom, the National Education Curriculum features spirituality as an area for development (Joseph, 2002). In addition, an increasing number of international conferences are held every year on the topic of spirituality and management. A significant number of these are held in the USA. This phenomenal interest in spirituality at work has motivated the academic community to take steps to promote theoretical and empirical research into the subject.

This is especially reflected in the number of special issues on spirituality, religion and management that have been published recently in academic journals such as *Leadership Quarterly* (2003, 14(6)), *ORGANIZATION* (2003, 10 (2)), *Journal of Applied Managerial Psychology* (2002, 19(3)), *Journal of Managerial Psychology* (2002, 17(3)), *Journal of Management Education* (October, 2000), *American Behavioural Scientist* (May, 2000), and *Journal of Organizational*

Change Management (2003, 16(4); 1999, 12(3 and 4); 1994, 9(6)). Since 1990, an estimate of the number of doctoral studies on the topic in progress or completed exceeds thirty and the number of Masters theses is considerably greater (Joseph, 2002). The majority of these originate in the USA.

II. CAUSES FOR THE GROWTH IN THE TOPIC

From an organisational perspective, a key factor for this growing interest is various benefit claims that arise from enacting spirituality at work. Several studies have provided evidence that spirituality is correlated with organisational performance, higher profits and success (Quatro, 2002; Mitroff and Denton, 1999; Neck and Milliman, 1994). Using Jaques' theory, King and Nicol (1999) suggest that people placed in roles that match their potential capability should achieve full capacity and therefore, meet their spiritual goals. Some researchers link these benefits with religious faith. For example, Christians work towards the common good of the community and the society as a whole (Krishnakumar and Neck, 2002). Other researchers link these benefits to values. For example, many spiritually based organisations have also made honesty their prime focus (Kriger and Hanson, 1999; Burack, 1999). Neck and Milliman (1994) identify individual creativity and intuition as benefits of practising spirituality at work. Spirituality can expand the frontiers of consciousness beyond the normal boundaries, leading to increased intuition and creativity (Krishnakumar and Neck, 2002). Spirituality at work also breeds awareness, which in turn breeds intuition, and intuition in turn leads to creativity (Freshman, 1999).

From an organisational member's point of view, referring to religious beliefs help business leaders to make effective decisions (Fort, 1996). Cavanagh (1999) claims the importance of relationships and highlights the benefits gained by developing an integrated perspective on firm, family, neighbours, community and self. Joseph (2002) comments that 'where the organisation values spirituality, employees:

- will be less fearful of their organisations
- will be far less likely to compromise their basic beliefs in the workplace
- will perceive their organisations as significantly more profitable
- report that they can bring significantly more of their complete selves to work – particularly creativity and intelligence' (p.60).

These and other similar benefit claims are the centrally most important reason for the recent growth in the interest on the topic. Staw and Epstein's (2000) study of large industrialized companies in the United States reveal that organisations' association with popular management techniques was not only due to improved economic performance but also social and material outcomes. They asked several questions to ascertain these beneficial outcomes.

1. Must organisations show that the techniques lead to improved economic performance, or is simple association with a popular technique sufficient?
2. Does the use of these techniques lead to an improved organisational reputation, irrespective of an organisation's resulting economic performance?
3. Are corporate leaders compensated for simply adopting such management techniques, or must they actually show improved organisational performance?

With the ascendance of 'spiritual talk', a litigious issue is how could we ascertain the extent to which organisations are seeking legitimacy rather than a genuine commitment to an authentic spirituality, which is beneficial to both employees and organisations. Although the emotional and people-oriented dimension is well represented in management theories, modern organisations have ignored this emotional, 'vernacular spirit' (Kleiner, 1996). Dehler and Welsh (1994) argue that work is an emotional experience and yet for the most part it has been neglected by management theory. The consequence has been the inability to spark other people's involvement and commitment by giving them work opportunities that are meaningful (Kleiner, 1996).

The contemporary spirituality at work phenomenon seems to offer a way to ignite this spark in today's organisations but in the process is sometimes accused of being yet another popular management approach.

III. EXPLOITING WORKPLACE SPIRITUALITY

Gibbons (2000a) claims that Human Relations, Organisational Development, Total Quality Management and Quality of Working Life were all more deeply researched than spirituality at work. Whilst he suggests that these have not lived up to their initial expectations, he wonders whether spirituality at work will face the same fate as these concepts. Gibbons (2000b) cites Gill and Whittle (1993) to describe the history of three management fads – Management by Objectives, Organisational Development, and Total Quality Management – whose life cycles took between 10 and 40 years to unfold. He is of the view that these descriptions would seem to apply to many of the popular books on spirituality at work. In my view, institutional theory reveals why organisations adopt popular management techniques of the day.

According to Staw and Epstein (2000) and Fernando (2001), institutional theorists have long dealt with the issue of why many organisational forms and procedures can exist without obvious technical or economic value (also Meyer and Rowan, 1977; Scott, 1995). Early qualitative and descriptive studies illustrated how organisations structures exist themselves not so much to execute their tasks more efficiently but to gain legitimacy or cultural support (Meyer and Rowan, 1983; DiMaggio, 1991). A core assumption of institutional theory is that organisations act to enhance or protect their legitimacy (Scott, 1995). Implicit in

most versions of institutional theory is the notion that organisations are less efficient or rational when they seek legitimacy rather than economic ends (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). In the case of workplace spirituality, with the ascendance of 'spiritual talk', a litigious issue is how could we ascertain the extent to which organisations are seeking legitimacy rather than a genuine commitment to an authentic spirituality?

The pursuit of legitimacy is presumed either to lead to non-efficient practices or to draw the firm's attention away from more essential activities. But, as Scott (1995) points out, even if an organisation pursues a policy or procedure for legitimacy reasons, this does not necessarily mean that there will be negative economic consequences. A gain in legitimacy could still materially benefit an organisation, since it may aid in securing valued resources or external support. For example, organisational members could conduct workplace spiritual practices even if they don't believe in such practices. In reality, those practices could have been promoted to meet the stakeholder expectations.

Thus, workplace spirituality seems susceptible of being 'adopted' without a genuine commitment to an authentic practice because it can be used as a tool to seek legitimacy with the stakeholders of the organisation. When it is motivated by such legitimacy, the wider acceptance of the organisations practising spirituality will at least be economically and socially beneficial. Therefore, one could argue that even without a genuine commitment to an authentic practice of spirituality, driven by legitimacy, organisations could have a motive to embrace workplace spirituality. Then, practising workplace spirituality raises genuine concerns about its use to further economic goals of organisations, and therefore, has the potential of becoming yet another management fad.

IV. CONCLUSION

If workplace spirituality is accepted as 'best practice', then its adoption will be at least economically beneficial to those organisations practising workplace spirituality. Therefore, even without a genuine commitment to an authentic practice of spirituality, driven by legitimacy, organisations could still have a motive to embrace workplace spirituality, introducing a possible faddish character to the contemporary workplace spirituality.

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