Relationship among Workplace Spirituality, Work Engagement and Grit

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Abstract: *Workplace Spirituality is an emerging concept of occupational health and positive psychology that realizes that employee's inner life at workplace in context with the community is nurtured by meaningful work. It is known to enhance work performance by nourishing the spirit of employees at work. The present study aimed to investigate the relationship among workplace spirituality, work engagement and grit. The authors collected data from 275 full-time employees in Delhi-NCR using convenient sampling. The relationship among workplace spirituality, work engagement and grit was measured using correlation and the influence of demographic variables (age, tenure and educational qualification) on workplace spirituality, work engagement and grit was measured using ANOVA. Results showed significant positive correlation between meaning at work and work engagement (r = .359, p<0.05). ANOVA findings indicate that age, tenure and educational qualification significantly differed across workplace spirituality, work engagement and grit.*
Keywords: *Workplace Spirituality, Inner Life, Meaning at Work, Work Engagement, Grit*

I. Introduction

Workplace spirituality refers to a framework of organizational values in which the work process acts as a catalyst in making the employees experience a sense of transcendence at their workplace thereby consolidating their sense of being- connected to other colleagues in a way that provides them a feeling to completeness and joy (Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003). It is conducive in promoting creativity at workplace (Guillory 2000; Cash and Gray, 2000; Harman and Hormann, 1990) and also leads to better communication among employees (Altaf and Awan, 2011).

The rapid economic growth has led to a surge in corporate profits and employee incomes but it has also led to an increase in workplace stress and lifestyle diseases. A study by Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (2015) showed that 42.5% of employees suffer from depression and general anxiety disorder. The Asia Pacific edition of the 'Staying@Work' survey conducted by Towers Watson (2014) showed that 1 in every 3 Indian employees experience stress in workplace. The survey also revealed that the major cause of stress among Indian employees was conflicting job expectations.

A vast body of literature has shown that workplace spirituality helps in reducing work-related stress and increasing work productivity. It provides a sense of completeness and enrichment to employees, making them happy and satisfied leading to increased organizational performance and financial success (Turner, 1999). Rego and Cunha (2007) found that when employees experience spirituality at workplace, they feel that they are affectively attached to the organization and experience a sense of obligation or loyalty towards the organization which further reinforces ethical behavior.

Rothbard (2001) defined engagement as "one's psychological presence in or focus on role activities". Psychological presence is defined as "the extent to which people are attentive, connected, integrated and focused on or in their role performance" (Kahn, 1992). Bakker and Leiter (2010) considered work engagement as a motivational concept. When employees are deeply involved in their work, they feel compelled to achieve a challenging goal. They experience a sense of flow in which they lose track of time and do not get affected by distractions. Work engagement positively influences an employee's performance. It allows him or her to bring his or her full potential to the job. It even supports extra-role performance by adopting a proactive approach to work. It motivates an employee to go beyond his or her core responsibilities and gain new knowledge.

Saks (2011) proposed a model of workplace spirituality and employee engagement in which three dimensions of workplace spirituality (transcendence, community, and spiritual values) are positively related with employee engagement (meaningfulness in work, meaningfulness at work, safety, and availability).

Grit is defined as perseverance and passion for long-term goals (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews and Kelly, 2007). Grit is conducive not just in the completion of a rigorous course, but it positively associated with academic grades. Strayhorn (2013) conducted a study on Black male collegian's academic success. The results indicated that grittier black males achieved higher grades than peers who were having similar GPAs, ACT scores and educational aspirations.

The current paper aimed to examine the relationship among workplace spirituality, work engagement and grit. Fry (2003) found that workplace spirituality not only leads to beneficial personal outcomes such as increased joy, peace, serenity, job satisfaction and commitment but it also improves productivity and reduces employee absenteeism and increases employee turnover.

1.1. Workplace Spirituality

Since Industrial Revolution, a vast body of literature has examined the ways to extract the best out of employees by promoting their identification with the organization. Whyte (1965) condemned the feudal attitude towards employees at American organizations in the mid-twentieth century and urged that the work ethic of treating the employees as conventional wage laborers should be substituted with a work ethic that encourages the employees to bring their heart and soul to their work. He argued that the old authoritarian man wanted your sweat but the new man wants your soul.

The research on workplace spirituality has shown a considerable variability on the extent to which spirituality and religion are related to each other. It has been found that religion-based workplace spirituality (practicing religious traditions) is helpful in making decisions in difficult moments as the connection with the ultimate provides a sense of solace, guidance and inspiration (Fernando and Jackson, 2006). But, if an organization endeavors to accommodate diverse religious and spiritual viewpoints, then some of its employees might be reluctant to accept their work as a source of spirituality which can further lead to unhealthy arguments among employees, increased stress and decreased organizational performance (Polley, Vora and SubbaNarasimha, 2005).

Workplace spirituality involves the efforts made by employees in finding the ultimate purpose of their lives, developing strong bonds of connection with colleagues and other people associated with work and achieving consistency between their core beliefs and the values of the organization in which they are employed (Mitroff and Denton, 1999).

Three dimensions of workplace spirituality are: meaningful work, community and inner life (Duchon and Plowman, 2005). Meaningful work means that an employee gets a deeper understanding of the meaning of his or her life as well as the life of others when his or her inner motivations, truths and desires are involved in the work done by him or her (Ashmos and Duchon, 2000; Hawley, 1993). Kahn (1992) found that jobs that are high on the core job characteristics provide the employees with space and incentives to bring more of themselves into their work or to be more engaged.

Community means the development of a strong connection or relationship of an employee with his or her colleagues (Maynard, 1992; Miller, 1992). Kahn (1990) found that supportive and trusting interpersonal relationships at workplace promotes psychological safety. Supportive environments allow members to experiment and to try new things and even fail without fear of the consequences (Kahn, 1990). Employees feel safe in environments that were characterized by openness and supportiveness. Inner Life means the feelings people have about who they are, what they are doing and what their contributions are (Vaill, 1998). Just like employees have physical, cognitive and emotional needs, they also have spiritual needs which constitute their inner lives. Shamir (1991) believed that a job is motivating when there is an overlap between the job context and the employee's inner life.

According to Etzioni (1961), a spiritual organization endeavors to engage its employees in the management of resources and opportunities in order to enhance spiritual insight. Saks (2006) found that employees who perceive higher organizational support are more likely to reciprocate with greater levels of engagement in their job and in the organization.

1.2. Work Engagement

Work Engagement is "the harnessing of organizational members' selves to their work roles" Kahn (1990). Two components of engagement are attention and absorption. Attention is determined by an individual's cognitive ability and the amount of time he or she remains focused on a role. On the other hand, absorption is determined by the intensity with which a person remains focused (on a role) and the degree to which he or she is involved in that role (Rothbard, 2001).

Engaged employees are also more likely to have a high-quality relationship with their employer leading them to also have more positive attitudes, intentions, and behaviors. Markoa and Sridevi (2010) also found that engaged employees are emotionally attached to their organization and are highly involved in their job to the extent that they are willing to go an extra mile beyond their employment contract.

It has been found that there is a positive relationship between work engagement and job resources such as social support from colleagues and supervisors, performance feedback, sill variety, autonomy and learning opportunities (Schaufeli and Salanova, 2007). Job resources can play an intrinsic as well as an extrinsic motivation role (Bakker and Leiter, 2010). They can act as a source of intrinsic motivation as they satisfy an individual's need for autonomy, relatedness and competence (Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste, De Witte and

Lens, 2008). They can even act as a source of extrinsic motivation as they act as an impetus in making the individuals willing to put in the best of his or her efforts and abilities to the work assigned to him or her (Meijman and Mulder, 1998).

Robinson et al. (2004) surveyed 10,000 NHS employees in Great Britain Institute of Employment Studies and found that that the key force behind employee engagement was making the employees feel valued and involved. For instance, involving the employees in the decision making process, providing them the freedom to develop their ideas and raise their voice on a certain issue etc.

Baumruk and Gorman (2006) believed that an engaged employee demonstrates three general behaviors which improve their performance. They are as follows:

Say- an employee advocates the decision of the organization before colleagues.

Stay- the employee has an intense desire to continue to remain in the organization despite of receiving better offers from other organizations.

Strive- the employee spends extra time, expends more efforts and takes initiatives to bring laurels to the organization.

It is similar to the idea of a "fit" between a person and a job or an organization. Person-organization fit is defined as compatibility between employees and organization (Lauver and Kristof-Brown, 2001; Sekiguchi, 2007). There are two aspects of this notion: demands-abilities fit, that is, the fit between an individual's skills, knowledge and abilities and the demands of a job; and needs-supplies fit, it refers to the fit between the needs and desires of an individual and what is provided by a job (Cable and Judge, 1996). It has been found that employees experience a high level of job satisfaction, when the personal characteristics of an employee are congruent with job requirements. Work engagement increases when there is an alignment between a corporation's and an employee's values (Bakker and Leiter, 2010). If a company promotes its values for employees and also responds to the values that the employees bring to work, then it helps in accommodating a variety of approaches to achieve challenging targets.

1.3. Grit

Galton (1869/2006) believed that an essential quality for achieving success is "zeal" (passion) and "the capacity for hard labor" (perseverance). Metaphorically, grit is described as "sweat not swagger, character not charisma". Duckworth et al.(2007) believed that grit acts as an efficient predictor of an individual's level of achievement in domains which require qualities other than just talent.

Grittier individuals work harder than their peers, and remain committed to chosen pursuits over a long period of time. There are various studies which stand testimony to this fact. Duckworth et al. (2007) conducted a study on 1248 cadets at West Point, the US Military Academy and found that grit played a vital role in the completion of the rigorous summer training. They concluded that the grittier the cadets were the lesser was the likelihood of drop out from summer training. Kraft and Duckworth (2014) found that grittier teachers were less likely to leave the classroom in mid-year in low-income schools (where conditions are tough) than less grittier teacher.

Hogan (2013) believed that grittier individuals work harder and longer than their peers and are more likely to engage in deliberate efforts to improve their performance. Grit is also positively associated with work outcomes.

Grittier individuals prefer to work alone. Duckworth et al. (2011) conducted a study on the relationship between grit and success at the National Spelling Bee. The results indicated that grittier participants were more likely to engage in deliberate but effective practice of studying and memorizing words in solitude than engaging in other methods of preparation. But, it does not mean that they are alienated from others. Levy and Steele (2011) found that there is a positive relation between grit and secure adult attachment style. Social support from family and colleagues and engagement in spiritual activities are pivotal forces behind grit (Vera, Gavino and Portugal, 2015).

II. Present Study

The purpose of the present study was to examine the relationship among workplace spirituality, work engagement and grit and to determine how these variables differ across age, tenure and educational qualifications.

III. Method

3.1. Sample

The sample comprised of full-time employees (20-60 years) working at organizations. The data was collected from 283 participants using convenient sampling. Eight questionnaires were discarded due to missing data resulting in a usable sample size of 275 employees. The participants were selected from various settings such as, neighborhood areas, government organizations, private organizations, multi-national corporations etc.

The sample comprised of 70.65% of male employees and 29.34% of female employees. 50.36% of the sample is over 35 years of age. 42.75% of the participants had work experience 1-5 years and 28.26% of the participants had a work experience of 20 years or more. 47.46% of the participants were graduates and 27.53% of the participants were post-graduates.

TABLE I: Sample Characteristics

Demographic Characteristics	n (%)
Gender	
Male	70.65
Females	42.75
Age	
20 years-less than 25 years	13.40
25 years-less than 35 years	36.95
35 years-less than 45 years	21.37
45 years-less than 60 years	27.89
Tenure	
1 year-less than 5 years	42.75
5 years-less than 10 years	15.94
10 years-less than 20 years	13.04
20 years or more	28.26
Educational Qualification	
High School Certificate or Equivalent	3.62
Bachelor Degree	47.46
Postgraduate with Associated Diploma	27.53
Professional	19.56
Notes: n=275	

3.2. Measures

The data for workplace spirituality was collected using a 7-point Likert scale questionnaire developed by Duchon and Plowman (2005). The items representing meaning at work, community and inner life were selected. The Cronbach alpha correlation for .864, for community is .857 and for inner life is .822 (Duchon and Plowman, 2005). The data for work engagement was collected using Work and Family Engagement Survey developed by Nancy P. Rothbard (2001). The items representing two dimensions of work engagement viz. attention and absorption were selected. The Cronbach alpha reliability of the survey ranged between .77 to .95, with a median of .87 (Rothbard, 2001). The data for Grit was collected using Short Grit Scale developed by Duckworth and Quinn (2009). The scale measured two dimensions viz. Consistency of Interests and Perseverance of Efforts. The Cronbach alpha reliability of the scale ranged between .82 to .84 (Duckworth and Quinn, 2009).

IV.   Results

Results showed significant positive correlation between meaning at work and work engagement (r = .359, p<0.05). ANOVA findings indicate that age, tenure and educational qualification significantly differed across workplace spirituality, work engagement and grit.

TABLE II: Descriptive Statistics and Correlation

		Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1	Grit	4.79	.717	-				
2	Meaning at Work	5.41	.93	.293*	-			
3	Sense of Community	5.31	.958	.161*	.567*	-		
4	Inner Life	5.57	1.002	.083**	.438*	.354*	-	
5	Work Engagement	5.11	.697	.096*	.359*	.257*	.221*	-
Notes: *p<0.05; **p<0.01								

TABLE III: Analysis of Variance among Workplace Spirituality, Work Engagement and Grit

	df	F	η	P
Age Group				
Meaning At Work	4	5.993	0.081	0.000
Community	4	1.032	0.015	0.391
Inner Life	4	5.052	0.069	0.001
Work Engagement	4	1.768	0.025	0.136
Grit	4	7.704	0.065	0.001
Educational Qualification				
Meaning At Work	4	1.299	0.018	0.271
Community	4	0.611	0.008	0.655

Inner Life	4	1.464	0.021	0.213
Work Engagement	4	1.628	0.023	0.167
Grit	4	0.833	0.012	0.505
Tenure				
Meaning At Work	3	8.126	0.082	0.000
Community	3	1.561	0.017	0.199
Inner Life	3	2.769	0.028	0.042
Work Engagement	3	1.424	0.156	0.236
Grit	3	4.915	0.052	0.002
Note: n=275				

V.   Discussion

The present study examined the relationship among workplace spirituality, work engagement and grit. Congruent with previous studies, our results show that there is a positive relation among meaning at work, work engagement and grit (Kumar and Kumar 2014; Penna research report, 2007). Our results showed that there was a very weak correlation among the three variables. The correlation between meaning at work and work engagement is .359, the correlation between sense of community and work engagement is .257 and the correlation between inner life and work engagement is .221. The correlation between work engagement and grit is .096. The correlation between meaning at work and grit is .293, the correlation between sense of community and grit is .161 and the correlation between inner life and grit is .083. This can be attributed to the fact that the people who are passionate about their work would have high engagement and perseverance irrespective of the conditions of their workplace.

Grittier individuals are akin to those with actualized selves, therefore it can be implied that such individuals have a high need for privacy due to which the attempts to establish a sense of community at workplace and provision of more incentives to increase engagement in work are not effective for such individuals. Kraft and Duckworth (2014) found that grittier teachers are less likely to leave the classroom in mid-year in low-income schools (where conditions are tough) than less grittier teacher.

Another possible explanation for the weak correlation among workplace spirituality, work engagement and grit is the intrinsic motivation of grittier individuals in doing their work. Employers attempt to promote work engagement by using external rewards or threats but, Amabile, DeJong and Lepper (1976) found other external factors like deadlines decrease intrinsic motivation. Grittier persons work on B-motivation; motivation through "being" or growth motivation, they are more concerned with what they have achieved and learned at a personal and intrinsic level rather than in terms of external rewards and benefits.

The weak correlation among the three variables highlights that organizations are failing to provide sufficient job resources to their employees to buffer the effect of job resources and job strain. Bakker and Demerouti (2007) found that when job demands are too taxing, it takes a toll on the employees' health and energy leading to low engagement. The Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory (Hobfoll, 1989) consolidates this finding. It states that people are motivated to obtain, retain and safeguard their resources when the resources are valuable. Therefore, it can be inferred that Indian organizations are not providing its employees with sufficient perks and privileges as a result of which the employees are not completely absorbed in their work.

Results of the study can also be attributed to work role ambiguity. The Asia Pacific edition of the 'Staying@Work' survey conducted by Towers Watson (2014) showed that the major cause of stress among Indian employees is conflicting job expectations. Several studies have found that work role ambiguity reduces work engagement (Lorente, Salanova, Martínez, Schaufeli, 2008; Inoue et al., 2014). If employees don't know what exactly they are expected to do then they cannot feel responsible for or committed to their work. Therefore, it can be inferred that role clarity is positively associated with work engagement.

Our results also indicate that a significant difference of age and tenure exists for the variables of workplace spirituality, work engagement and grit. This suggests that the longer the participants are employed at an organization, the more they experience their work as a spiritual exercise which furthers their engagement and passion towards their work. It also suggests that the long duration of employment is conducive in building a sense of community at workplace. Generally, experienced employees are also more revered which can be helpful in explaining their absorption in their work.

The results of our study also suggest that Indian employees are quite servile; they are not very proactive in demanding resources from their employers. It has been found that job crafting i.e., giving the employees an opportunity to make changes in the levels of job demands and resources leads to an increase in work engagement (Bakker, Tims and Derks, 2012). Petrou et al. (2012) found that the engagement of employees is high when they seek more resources and challenges at their workplace.

The weak correlation among meaning at work, work engagement and grit elucidates the quality of demands made on the employees by the employers. In order to ensure that the employees are engaged in their

work it is imperative that they should be continuously challenged, but at the same time it should be ensured that the challenge is complacent to their ability.

The results also revealed that there was no significant relation between educational qualifications and workplace spirituality, work engagement and grit. It indicates that the current education system of the country is not encouraging students to explore what they like in depth. Also, the cut-throat competition is deterring students and young employees to become completely absorbed in one activity due to the high need for achievement among the youth today. The emphasis on being an all-rounder is sapping rewards of intrinsic pleasure.

A major contribution of the present study is that it is first study to examine the link between workplace spirituality, work engagement and grit. Our results showed that only meaning at work was positively related to work engagement and grit. Thus, it appears that the engagement of grittier employees will be high when the work provided to them is meaningful and not when the employers attempt to establish a community at the workplace and replenish the inner lives of employees by providing by external rewards.

VI. Conclusion

Our results have important implications for organizations and employers. It highlights that organizations need to hire employees whose skills set match their job roles. When there is a person-organization fit, employees feel content with their job and also take initiatives to go beyond what is expected of them. Organizations must understand that salary or pay is not the only motivating factor; they need to provide their employees with opportunities to grow professionally as well as personally.

Our results also show the importance of personality variables and environmental variables in promoting employee well-being and job performance. Provision of a conducive environment is not sufficient in making the employees absorbed in their work. It is pertinent that employees are given challenging work so that their cognitive needs can be satisfied as well.

Despite a large sample, our study had some limitations. First, the grit questionnaire (a self report measure) may have led to social desirability bias. Since passion and perseverance are positive traits, therefore, the participants might have not given genuine responses in order to portray themselves in a positive light. Second, we attempted to study an intrinsic concept such as grit using quantitative measure. It shows that quantitative research method has limitations in studying deeply subjective and intrinsic concepts like grit. It also fails to answer "why" and "how" of a behavior. Qualitative research methods such as personal interview or focused group discussion would have been more appropriate to study work engagement and grit as they allow the research to conduct a micro analysis of parts and multi-layered interpretation of individual mental construction. And, third, the data was collected using convenient sampling as a result of which it is not fully capable of establishing relationship among variables. A convenient sample is prone to systematic errors and may result in a misrepresentative sample.

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