

Does Individual Spirituality Really Matter to Work Engagement?

Evidence from Private Institutes which offer Foreign Degrees in Affiliation with Foreign Universities (PIOFDAFU)

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Abstract

Education in a country is a vital factor to provide job opportunities to people and to make the country economic development. It is significant to develop Sri Lanka higher education regionally and internationally to compete with other countries. To get the high performance in the organization, it is important to identify the physical, psychological and spiritual dimensions towards work engagement. Most of the researchers have identified the physical and psychological factors. But all these years many organizations have neglected the importance of spirituality to the work engagement. Thus, the objective of this study was to explore the impact of individual spirituality on work engagement of the academic staff of Private institutes which offer Foreign degrees in affiliation with Foreign Universities (PIOFDAFU). The individual spirituality, which was measured by three dimensions; namely, larger context, awareness of life and compassion was the independent variable of the study, while, work engagement, which was measured through three dimensions, which are; vigor, dedication and absorption was the dependent variable of the current study. A structured questionnaire was distributed to collect the views from 200 academic employees in PIOFDAFUs in Sri Lanka. Findings revealed that, there is a significant positive impact of individual spirituality on work engagement of the academic employees of PIOFDAFUs in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Individual Spirituality, Spirituality, Work Engagement, Private Institutes

1. INTRODUCTION

Many organizations are encouraging the development of this new trend of spiritual, because they believe this kind of humanistic work environment creates benefits for both employees and the organization. If people in the organization are happy, the

organization can achieve productivity and creativity of employees. To achieve the high productivity many corporations are in development of this new trend called “spirituality” because they believe humanistic work experience creates a win win situation for both employee and the

organization. If the member in the organization are happy there will be more productive, more creative and more fulfilled.(Garcia-Zamor, 2003).

Now some organizations have already identified the importance of the humanistic values of the employees to the high performance of organization. Organizations are now focused on helping the employees to balance the workplace and the personal life. Some Organizations are thinking of ways to balance the employees using different methods to get the high performance.

Ashmos and Duchon define spirituality at work as the recognition of employee's inner life that nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work and takes place in the context of community. (Ashmos and Duchon, 2000).

In any organization motivated people have made a decision to apply considerable efforts to achieve something that they value. The value will be different from one individual to another. The most people in the organizations do the work in fear of losing their job. Some people do the job not because the job satisfies them but because they get a salary at the end of the month. There is another group of people they do the job because they have their own goals to be achieved or they are engaged with achieving the organizational goals without consider about themselves.

When the employees are facing to this type of situations the organizations itself cannot achieve the productivity and the efficiency that they are expecting. The main reason for this kind of situation is, employees in the

organization are not working happily in the organization. According to the traditional view, when the people are not happily working in the organizations, we can get to know about the employees by identifying the symptoms at its most extreme.

The people will come to work lately, they wanted to go home early, high absenteeism, people get leaves most of the time, Unproductive work like spending time with you tube, face book, watching movies, chatting with the others. The people dislike work, they work only for money, people cannot manage their own work and they cannot direct themselves to achieve goals, they do mistakes all the time, the employees get angry with their subordinators, they spend their most of the time by gossiping the top management faults with the other company members and when the top management give a group work to the employees they are not achieving it on time. It is management's job is to identify what the people are good in and assigning them to the work that they like to do will act as a motivation factor to get high productivity.

In private education sector, some lecturers are assigned to do modules that the lecturer does not like to do or in some situations the lecturer does not have the knowledge about the particular subject. In this type of situations, the lecturers cannot do the maximum to the students. He/she will deliver the module somehow to stop the blame that he is getting from the top management. Therefore, the lecturer will not put his/her maximum effort to deliver the module to the students. The students will not get the expected out come from the lecturer.

But if the lecturer is assigned to a module that he/she is good in, he/she will do more researchers and may find the best way to deliver the module to the students to give the maximum. This will happen because he/she is happy with the assigned work. So that by identifying the people that they are good in will act as a motivation factor and can get high productivity.

Today in Sri Lanka, Education is an important focal point to provide job opportunities to people to make the country economy rise. Sri Lanka has now been moved to knowledge based economy from service economy. Therefore, Sri Lanka has to compete with other countries that are already developed their higher education system. Hence, Sri Lanka also should develop their higher education regionally and internationally to compete with other countries. (Saman Kelegama, 2017)

According to the e-book of strategic management for tourism hospitality and events, it has mentioned that the skilled labor of Sri Lanka has high turnover rates in higher education sector because of low salaries and unfavorable work conditions. They have also analyzed higher educational institutes cannot meet the demand of the labor because there are less of job opportunities for the young people who are trying to enter to this industry (Evens N,2015).

Therefore, it is vital to find the reasons behind this high turnover rates and the factors affecting to work engagement of the academic staff of PIOFDAFUs in Sri Lanka. If the employees are satisfied, their work engagement is also found to be high. There are so

many factors affecting to employee satisfaction and they can be either categorized under physical factors, mental factors and spiritual factors. In Sri Lanka, most of the organizations have still not identified the importance of spirituality. Most of the organizations are doing changes to the organizational employees without giving attention to the spirituality as a motivational factor. In new business environment, organizations are trying to get the maximum from the employees. Though, there are plenty of research studies done on such physical and mental factors, still there is a research gap to fill by executing research on impact of spiritual factors on work engagement. Hence, the objective of this research is to identify the impact of individual spirituality on work engagement of the academic employees in PIOFDAFUs in Sri Lanka.

From the Latin words ‘spirare’ and ‘spiritus’, the word spirit has been created by giving the meaning of breath, vapor, air or wind (Fox, 1994). We need to breathe to live alive. People think when we die the spirit in our body will be gone. This word is interconnected with religious values (Ashmos and Duchon 2000).

Now a day the term “spiritually” has become an important factor in organizations. The organizations are trying to get the maximum out of employees. But the organizations are not realizing that they cannot get the maximum of the employees without careering the entire person. Academic literature on spirituality has been expanded very recently by Saas in 2000 (Saas, 2000).

The changes in the global economy like competition, population and globalization have realized that the current policies and procedures are not applicable for the 21st century. Some of these factors are demotivate and demoralize the employees in an organization.

Interest of the spirituality has been grown in locally and globally. People have identified the importance of spirituality and its values. Spirituality has been involved to increase the motivation of the employees. Many scholars have tried to find the exact meaning of spirituality in different ways. Many researchers have done researches about spirituality in a professional way. In organizational science, the evaluators and academic researchers like Cavanagh 1999, Sass 2000 have done researches about the spirituality (Cavanagh, 1999, Sass, 2000). Some of the practitioners, like, Laabs has done researches about spirituality (Laabs, 1995). Some organizations have found some solutions from spirituality to make the organization a better place.

Spirituality was identified by the scholars in two perspectives; Individual spirituality and organizational spirituality. Bregman and Thierman in 1995 has identified individual spirituality as "spirituality is how the individually lives meaningfully with ultimacy in his or her response to the deepest truths of the universe (Bregman and Thierman, 1995). In accordance with Armstrong in 1995, "individual spirituality is the presence of a relationship with a higher power that effects the way in which one operates in the word" (Armstrong, 1995).

Emblen in 1992 described that, the "individual spirituality is a personal life experience that animates a transcendent quality of relationship with the god" (Emblen, 1992). Mauritzen in 1988 defined the individual spirituality is "as a human dimension that transcends the biological, psychological and social aspects of living (Mauritzen, 1988).

Even though many scholarly efforts have been attempted to find out the importance of the concept of spirituality in the workplace, findings did not much effect to the development of the field in some years ago. But, it is found in the current scenario that, people have a tendency to identify the significance of the concept of spirituality in the workplace. The scientific assessment of spirituality has become more important. Moreover, the results of scientific research based on the spirituality in the workplace are accepted and sometimes applied by the people in their workplace.

Therefore, the topic of workplace spirituality or organizational spirituality has become now an interesting topic among the scholars as well as among the practitioners. Giacalone and Jurkiewicz in 2003 have identified that, there is a great increase of articles and researchers in the field of workplace spirituality, when it compared with the last decades with the twentieth century and also when it compares with the new millennium (Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003).

In this study attempt had been made to identify only the impact of individual spirituality on work engagement, not

the impact of organizational spirituality on work engagement.

The theory of work engagement as a concept has been existed for many years with different developments and conceptualization for the concept. Kahn in 1990 firstly conceptualized the theory of work engagement as,

“harnessing of organizational members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performances. In other word, people bring their personal selves into their work”.

Furthermore, confusing the attempts to describe and measure work engagement, other several scholars employed different approaches. For example, Rothbard (2001), who was stimulated by Kahn (1990), described work engagement as a two-dimensional concept that includes *attention* (i.e., the time one spends thinking about one’s role at work), and *absorption* (i.e., the intensity of one’s focus on a role at work). May, Gilson, and Harter (2004) agreed Kahn’s multi-layered concept of work engagement and established a measure for work engagement, but they failed to confirm work engagement as a multi-layered concept.

2. METHODS

The data was collected for the current study from 200 academic staff of PIOFDAFUs in Sri Lanka and for the purpose a structured questionnaire was distributed among the sample. The collected data was analyzed using regression analysis and for the purpose of data analysis, the Statistical

Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with Analysis of Movement Structures (AMOS) were utilized.

2.1 Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

The independent variable of the study was Individual spirituality and it was measured using three dimensions; namely, larger context, awareness of life and compassion according to the Human Spirituality Scale (HSS) was developed by Wheat (1991:166-168). The first section of HSS larger context subscale includes altruism or selflessness, truth, justice or morality, and meaning and purpose in life; the awareness of life subscale includes personal growth and wholeness, some aspects regarding sacredness or significance of life, and a connection with other life dimensions; the compassion subscale includes some aspects regarding sacredness or significance in life and awareness of pain and suffering (Wheat, 1991).

The dependent variable of the study was work engagement and it was measured using three dimensions, which are; vigor, dedication and absorption according to Schaufeli, Salanova and Bakker (2003). According to Schaufeli, Salanova and Bakker (2003), Vigor is described by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the readiness to invest effort in one’s work, and perseverance even in the face of difficulties. Dedication denotes to being strongly involved in one's work and experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge. Absorption has the characteristics of being fully

concentrated and happily occupied in one's work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work.

Accordingly, the measurement Scale of Work Engagement used in this study is based on the UTRECHT Work Engagement Scale (UWES) developed by Schaufeli, Salanova and Bakker (2003).

Accordingly, the conceptual framework of current study can be illustrated as follows;

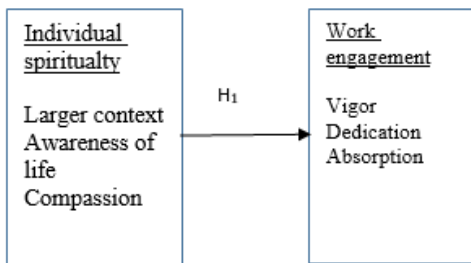


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework
Source: Constructed by author

The hypothesis of the study is;

H1 There is a significant positive impact of individual spirituality on work engagement of academic staff of PIOFDAFUs in Sri Lanka

The questionnaire consisted with 14 questions to measure individual spirituality and 13 questions to measure work engagement. In addition to that, the respondents' demographic factors, such as, age, gender, qualifications, designation, duration of service, income, marital status and number of children.

The structural model of the present research can be presented as bellow;

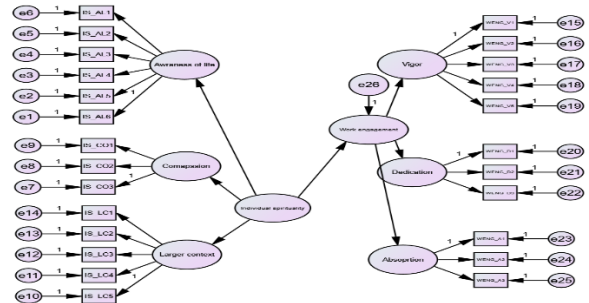


Figure 2. Structural Model
Source: Constructed by Author

3. RESULTS

3.1 Regression Analysis

Before running the regression analysis, the second order Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was done for two structural models of the current study including two main variables of the study, which are individual spirituality and work engagement and their respective latent variables (for individual spirituality, larger context, awareness of life and compassion, for work engagement, vigor, dedication and absorption), and for observed variables under each latent variables, which were represented by their respective questions.

After executing CFA, the Standardized regression weights (factor loadings) and squared multiple correlations, which are R2 values were recognized, between three latent variables, which are; vigor, dedication and absorption and the main latent

variable of work engagement and between three latent variables, which are; larger context, awareness of life and compassion and the main latent variable of individual spirituality. Furthermore, standardized regression weights and squared multiple correlations of three latent variables of vigor, dedication and absorption with their respective observed variables and three latent variables of larger context, awareness of life and compassion with their respective observed variables also were identified.

There should be more than 0.5 value for standardized regression weights to be accepted as a good representative factor for latent or observed variable. Accordingly, after identifying low standardized regression weights, they were removed and hence all the fitness indices, which measure the absolute fit, incremental fit and parsimonious fit were achieved.

Then, unidimensionality, validity and reliability were tested. Accordingly, unidimensionality was identified through second order CFA done for the present study and it is considered as achieved the unidimensionality, if the standardized regression weights are met the standard level of 0.5 according to Awang (2012). Validity can be verified through convergent validity, construct validity and discriminant validity. Convergent validity is attained when all items in a measurement model are statistically significant. It is confirmed through the p values of unstandardized regression weights for all the latent constructs and all the observed variables of the structural model of this study. construct validity is reached when the

fitness indices for a construct achieved the required level. According to the second order CFA executed for this study, it can be observed that, the fitness indices to measure the absolute fit, incremental fit and parsimonious fit relating to two structural models of the current study were achieved the required standard level. Finally, discriminant validity is achieved when the measurement model is free from redundant items, which can be identified through high Modification Indices (MI) and accordingly, two structural models in this second order CFA in this study identified redundant items through high MI and they were deleted.

Reliability in the forms of internal reliability, composite reliability and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was tested for the present study. Internal reliability can be achieved through the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, which is higher than 0.7, which is calculated using SPSS. In order to achieve Composite Reliability (CR) for a construct, value of CR should be greater than 0.6 is required. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for a construct should be greater than 0.5 to achieve the reliability.

Following Table 1 illustrates the Cronbach's Alpha coefficients, Composite Reliability values and AVE values for all the dimensions of each variable of the structural model of the current study.

Table 1. Cronbach’s Alpha Coefficients, Composite Reliability Values and AVE values for the Dimensions

Variable	Dimensions	Cronbach’s Alpha Coefficients	Composite Reliability	AVE
Work Engagement	Vigor	0.875	0.87	0.58
	Dedication	0.798	0.81	0.59
	Absorption	0.820	0.82	0.61
Individual Spirituality	Awareness of Life	0.917	0.88	0.58
	Larger Context	0.905	0.89	0.62
	Compassion	0.859	0.89	0.75

Source: Author constructed from SPSS and SPSS AMOS Output

Normality assessment was also done in order to qualify for running regression analysis. It was verified through identifying the skewness for every item. If the absolute value of skewness is 1.0 or less than 1.0, it indicates the data is normally distributed (Awang, 2012). Accordingly, it was identified that, absolute value of skewness for every item of work engagement and individual spirituality were achieved the required level.

The regression results revealed that, the 94.7% of the variance in the work engagement can be explained by the individual spirituality of the academic employees of PIOFDAFUs in Sri Lanka. Further, the impact of individual spirituality (0.884) on work engagement was found to be positive and statistically significant ($p = 0.000$).

Following figure presents the structural model with regression results.

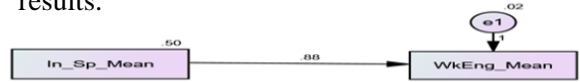


Figure 3. Structural Model with regression results

Source: Constructed by author from SEM with AMOS output

4. DISCUSSION

The majority of the respondents are in the age range from 31 years to 40 years (39%). Further, the next highest percentage is for the age range from 20 years to 30 years (34.5%). The lowest percentage was reported for the age range of more than 60 years (2%). Moreover, it can be seen that the majority of the respondents are males (73%).

And also, the majority of the respondents are in the Lecturer position (47%), while the least respondents can be found from the designation of Professor (4.5%). It can be observed that, 43.5% of the respondents have Masters’ degree, and 29.5% has first degree. Diploma holders are 15.55% from the total respondents and PhD holders are 11.5% from the total respondents.

Further, it is observed that, the highest percentage of respondents (53%) are working in PIOFDAFUs for more than 2 years. 47% of respondents’ service duration is less than 2 years. And also, the majority of the respondents are married (81.5%). 17% of the respondents are single, while the balanced 1.5% of the respondents belongs to the divorce category.

Moreover, the majority of the respondents (44%) belong to the income range from Rs. 50,001 to Rs. 100,000. 37.5% of the respondents earn the income ranging from Rs. 35,001 to Rs. 50,000. The least respondents (3.5%) belongs to the income level of more than Rs. 150,000.

Finally, it can be observed that, the majority of the respondents (33.5%) has one child. 29.5% of the respondents has two children and 19.5% of the respondents has no children. There is only 1% of the respondents has more than three children.

It was found from the regression analysis that, there was a significant positive impact of individual spirituality on work engagement of of the academic staff of Non-State, Unregistered Higher Educational Institutes in Sri Lanka. Therefore, the hypothesis of the current study, which is; there is a significant positive impact of individual spirituality on work engagement of academic staff of PIOFDUFUs in Sri Lanka can be accepted.

5. CONCLUSION

It was found in the literature that, a research gap in identifying the impact of individual spirituality on work engagement of employees, especially in Sri Lankan context. Further, it was found that, the employee turnover, especially among the academic staff of PIOFDUFUs in Sri Lanka was rapidly increased in recent past. Therefore, the objective of the present study was to identify the impact of individual spirituality on work engagement of

academic staff of PIOFDUFUs in Sri Lanka. For the purpose, a sample of 200 academic staff was selected and a structured questionnaire was distributed to collect the views of the respondents. The collected data was analyzed using regression analysis and the regression analysis was done using SEM with AMOS. The results revealed that, there is a significant positive impact of individual spirituality on work engagement of academic staff of PIOFDUFUs in Sri Lanka. Further, the individual spirituality has a greater explanatory power (94.7%) on the work engagement.

Therefore, it can be concluded that, by improving the level of individual spirituality of academic employees of PIOFDUFUs in Sri Lanka, work engagement of them can also be enhanced. Further, it can be concluded that, the individual spirituality of the academic employees can be enhanced by improving the three dimensions of individual spirituality, which are; larger context, awareness of life and compassion.

Hence, the authority can formulate strategies, which can enhance the individual spirituality of the academic employees of PIOFDUFUs in Sri Lanka.

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