

The relationship between workplace spirituality and job involvement: A South African study

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Abstract

Although workplace spirituality has been investigated over the past 20 years, much remains unknown about this topic. The aim of the study was to confirm previous research findings regarding the relationship between workplace spirituality and job involvement for a South African sample, and to extend the current limited body of knowledge regarding workplace spirituality by determining a relationship between job involvement and workplace spirituality. From a positive psychological framework, it is postulated that workplace spirituality will lead to job involvement. The intention was to determine whether a change in job involvement can be attributed to workplace spirituality. A cross-sectional study was conducted with a sample of 412 employees chosen from two organisations in Welkom, South Africa. The sociodemographic variables, workplace

spirituality and job involvement were measured using a quantitative measuring instrument. The main findings of this research indicated a positive statistical significant relationship between workplace spirituality and job involvement. The results showed that a change in job involvement can be attributed to workplace spirituality. These findings have deepened the current understanding of workplace spirituality and positive work-related attitudes.

Keywords: workplace spirituality, spirituality, job involvement, South Africa, quantitative research

1. Introduction

The volatile, highly unstable economic climate within which organisations are expected to function is characterised by factors such as globalisation, increasingly competitive and unpredictable markets, downsizing, critical skills shortages, and restructuring, to mention a few (Mafini, Surujlal & Dhurup, 2013:12). These factors exert considerable pressure, which compels organisations and employees to do more with less, with a strong emphasis on tangible outcomes and financial results. These changing conditions have led to workplaces becoming increasingly detached from emotional and spiritual aspects (Karakas, 2010:91). The aforementioned is cause for concern, taking into consideration that today employees spend more time at work than ever before.

Organisations are currently thus faced with numerous employee-related problems, with employees becoming increasingly dissatisfied (Barrett, 2004:267). This indicates that organisations need to create new systems to deal effectively with changes that are taking place, both internally and externally. Since employees expect more from their organisations than merely a fair wage at the end of the month,

organisations need to consider introducing spirituality into the workplace (Van der Walt, 2007:32).

Although workplace spirituality has recently received increased attention, much still remains unknown about this topic, particularly in the South African context. For this reason, it is important to expand the body of knowledge with regard to workplace spirituality, in order to gain a clearer understanding of this phenomenon, and to understand how it influences workplace behaviour and attitudes. Milliman, Czaplewski and Ferguson (2003:429) are of the opinion that the relationship between workplace spirituality and job-related attitudes is important, and that this is a legitimate area of inquiry. Previous studies investigating workplace spirituality and work-related attitudes have focused mainly on the relationship between workplace spirituality and job satisfaction. Noor and Arif (2011:513) found that spirituality plays a pivotal role in employees' job satisfaction. These findings are consistent with those of Van der Walt and De Klerk (2014:379) who established a positive relationship between workplace spirituality and job satisfaction in the South African context. Milliman et al. (2003:440) indicated a positive association between workplace spirituality and various job-related outcomes, such as organisational commitment, intention to quit, intrinsic work satisfaction, job involvement, and organisation-based self-esteem. The above-mentioned variables were included in a study by Crawford, Hubbard, Lonis-Shumate and O'Neill (2009:64) conducted in the hospitality industry, in which statistically significant relationships were reported between workplace spirituality and organisational commitment, job involvement, and organisation-based self-esteem. In addition, Pawar (2009:773) reported a statistically significant association between workplace spirituality and work attitudes, including job

satisfaction, job involvement, and organisational commitment. These findings indicate the significant and positive role that spirituality plays to create positive work-related attitudes. Based on previous research findings, which showed an association between workplace spirituality and positive work-related attitudes, the hypothesis in this research is that workplace spirituality will likewise be positively associated with the work-related attitude investigated in the study, namely job involvement for a South African sample.

2. Study Rationale & Motivation

Workplace spirituality is a relatively new concept, which has not yet been adequately investigated. It has been identified that there is a paucity of studies that have been conducted on workplace spirituality in the South African context, and most of these studies have been qualitative in nature (e.g. Alberts, 2009; Honiball, 2009; Lakey, 2010). Although some initial quantitative studies have shown a relationship between workplace spirituality and various organisational outcomes (e.g. Milliman et al., 2003; Crawford et al., 2009; Pawar, 2009; Noor & Arif, 2011), the outcomes of these studies have not yet been corroborated or tested on a South African sample. Furthermore, previous studies have explicitly stated that the association between workplace spirituality and organisational outcomes has been inadequately investigated (Milliman et al., 2003:427). In a study conducted by Van der Walt (2007:203), it was proposed that workplace spirituality should be investigated further, in order to determine the impact thereof on work-related outcomes, specifically individual work-related attitudes and behaviour. Petchsawang and Duchon (2009:466) confirm this, by stating that more empirical work is needed to determine whether workplace spirituality is connected to work

outcomes, such as job satisfaction and organisational commitment. In order to formulate and validate workplace spirituality theories, it is essential that the concept also be quantitatively investigated. Van der Walt and De Klerk (2014:383) assert that the relationship between organizational spirituality and positive outcomes such as job satisfaction has not received the same level of attention as the study of individual spirituality and its relation to a number of organizational and individual outcomes.

Limited attention has been given to the relationship between job involvement and workplace spirituality. In a study by Crawford et al. (2009), workplace spirituality and various employee variables in the lodging hospitality industry were investigated. The findings of the study indicated that a significant relationship exists between job involvement and workplace spirituality (Crawford et al., 2009:64). Word (2012:147) also investigated the link between workplace spirituality and job involvement, and reported that workplace spirituality has the potential to increase employees' job involvement. As far as the researcher could establish, no studies have investigated the relationship between job involvement and workplace spirituality for a South African sample. Therefore the objectives of the study are: First, to determine whether a significant relationship exists between workplace spirituality and job involvement for a South African sample; and second, to determine whether workplace spirituality statistically significantly predict a change in degree of job involvement.

3. Workplace Spirituality

According to Marschke, Preziosi and Harrington (2011:71), there is a general belief that for an organisation in the 21st century to thrive, it is necessary for management and

employees to tap into their spiritual resources. Smith and Rayment (2007:217) contend that workplace spirituality will not only be beneficial to individuals and organisations, but will also contribute in a meaningful way to society at large. According to Van der Walt and De Klerk (2014:380) authors are not yet in full agreement on the conceptual definition of workplace spirituality, but enough work has been done on the construct to offer workable definitions. Workplace spirituality is defined as “a framework of organizational values evidenced in the culture that promotes employees’ experience of transcendence through the work process, facilitating their sense of being connected to one others in a way that provides feelings of completeness and joy” (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003a: 23). Workplace spirituality has also been defined as “the recognition that employees have an inner life that nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work that takes place in the context of community” (Duchon & Plowman, 2005: 811). Both these definitions clearly show a reciprocal relationship between the world of work and spirituality, and the way the one manifests itself in the other. For this reason, it is important to investigate the concept of workplace spirituality, in order to gain a deeper and more holistic understanding of the construct, and to establish the relationship it has with work-related behaviours and attitudes.

Workplace spirituality consists of both individual or personal spirituality and organisational personality. For the purpose of this study, workplace spirituality will only be investigated on an organisational level. Thus, in the next section the existential perspective of workplace spirituality will be discussed, which is appropriate when considering workplace spirituality from an organisational perspective (De Klerk, 2005:70). Bennis and Nanus, as quoted in Sanders, Hopkins and Geroy (2005:46), state that the existential

perspective refers to the capacity of organisations to construct and manage significance in task performance for their employees. Thus, in the context of the workplace, this perspective refers to employees searching for meaning and purpose in what they do. Milliman et al. (2003:429) argue that for employees to be involved in tasks that give meaning and purpose to them is essential for spirituality in the workplace.

According to Krishnakuman and Neck (2002: 156) and Kale and Shrivastava (2003:310), the existential perspective includes a sense of “connectedness”. For this reason, organisations should be sensitive to establishing an organisational culture where employees feel that they are connected to others (both internal and external to the organisation). Zumeta (1993:26) suggests that when employees experience true spirituality, they will feel connected to themselves, others, the environment, the planet, and the universe. This is of fundamental importance, if one takes into consideration that the workplace has become the centre of activity for most people, as well as the nucleus of social contact and interpersonal distress (Bhania & Somnath, 2011: 21). The existential perspective focuses on the spiritual nature of the workplace itself, and what the organisation can do to assist employees to experience spirituality at work, regardless of their spiritual orientation. According to Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003b: 87), organisations will be regarded as spiritual if they adhere to spiritual values such as benevolence, generativity, humanism, justice, receptivity, respect, self-transcendence, trust, and mutuality. Furthermore, these spiritual values should be represented in the organisation’s philosophy, mission, goals, and objectives (Milliman, Ferguson, Trickett & Condemi, 1999: 230). Spiritual-based organisational cultures will be characterised as having a strong sense of purpose, mutual trust, honesty and openness,

humanistic work practices, and tolerance of employee expression (De Klerk, 2005: 70-71).

4. Job Involvement

Job involvement is important from both an employee perspective and an organisational perspective (Latha, 2012: 2). From an employee perspective, job involvement is considered a key factor that could lead to personal growth, satisfaction, and goal-directed behaviour within the workplace, and from an organisational perspective, job involvement has been considered essential in ensuring employee motivation, which, in turn, is a fundamental factor in facilitating a competitive advantage (Latha, 2012: 2).

Defining and measuring job involvement has caused a great deal of controversy (Kaplan, Boshoff & Kellerman, 1991: 4). One of the earlier definitions of job involvement states that job involvement refers to the extent to which employees identify psychologically with their work, or the importance of their occupation to their self-image, and the degree to which their work performance affects their self-esteem (Lodahl & Kejner, 1965:24). According to Kaplan *et al.* (1991:4), Kanungo (1982) has produced one of the most consistent definitions and measurements of job involvement. Kanungo (1982: 342) defines job involvement as an individual's psychological identification with their job. He further distinguishes between work involvement and job involvement, stating that job involvement refers to involvement in a specific job, while work involvement refers to a person's involvement in their work (Kanungo, 1982: 342). Work involvement seems to be related to work centrality, and a person can only experience work involvement if they value their work and see it as an extension of their life. For an employee to experience

job involvement, the job must satisfy their needs, and the individual must perceive the job as important, and must psychologically identify with it. Lodahl and Kejner (1965: 24-33) assert that job involvement consists of four important dimensions, namely how a person responds to their work, their expression of job involvement, an employee's sense of duty and feelings about unfinished work, and absenteeism (Lodahl & Kejner, 1965:24-33). Govender and Parumasur (2010:239) offer the opinion that employees do not express job involvement in the same way, and that employees' expression of job involvement depends on the level of job involvement that they experience.

There would seem to be a paucity of contemporary theories and perspectives regarding the concept of job involvement (Govender & Parumasur, 2010:239). Van der Westhuizen (2006:60-64) discussed job involvement in terms of the dispositional perspective, the situational perspective, and the interaction between these two approaches. According to Govender and Parumasur (2010:239), researchers have often debated whether job involvement is the result of individual and personality differences (see, for instance, Dubin, 1956; Lodahl & Kejner, 1965), situational factors (see Bass, 1965; Vroom, 1962), or an individual-situation interaction (see Lawler & Hall, 1970; Lodahl & Kejner, 1965; Muchinsky, 1990). According to the dispositional perspective of job involvement, job involvement will be determined by individual characteristics related to the employee. Thus, some employees will experience job involvement because of an innate disposition, and not due to the situation that they find themselves in. From the situational perspective, certain situational variables have been shown to be related to job involvement. The situational perspective suggests that job involvement can be influenced by experiences and

psychological reactions to a person's work (Carmeli, 2005: 458). The interactive perspective of job involvement explains job involvement as a function of the interaction between personal characteristics and the situation (or the working environment). As Kanungo (1982: 341) suggested, the interaction between individual differences and situational factors influences job involvement. Thus, personality and situational factors jointly influence a person's level of job involvement. Ultimately if personality characteristics and situational factors are in congruence, an employee will develop higher levels of job involvement (see Ho, 2006: 35).

5. Methodology

The study is quantitative in nature. Quantitative studies involve amounts, or quantities of one or more variables (Leedy and Ormrod, 2010: 94). McDaniel and Gates (2001:98) assert that quantitative studies involve data that are subjected to mathematical analysis where such analysis can reveal statistical significant differences. Hence, a quantitative research design was appropriate for the purposes of this research, which are to determine the relationship between the independent variable, workplace spirituality and the dependent variable (job involvement). A cross-sectional research design was used because the research was carried out at a specific point in time on a sample of two organisations. Also, it was found to be an inexpensive method to use.

5.1 Measuring instruments

Workplace spirituality was measured using the Organizational Spiritual Values Scale (OSVS) developed by Kolodinsky, Giacalone and Jurkiewicz et al. (2004). The OSVS assesses an individual's perception of the spiritual values exhibited by his

or her organisation. It consists of one factor containing 20 items. Scoring is done through a Likert-type scaling, ranging from 1 (completely false) to 5 (completely true). Kolodinsky, Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2008:469) reported an internal consistency reliability estimate of 0.93 for the OSVS. In a South African study, Van der Walt (2007:141) reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.95 for this instrument. This provides support for the assumption that the OSVS can be used with confidence in the South African context to measure workplace spirituality. Job involvement was measured using the Job Involvement Questionnaire (JIQ) which was developed by Kanungo (1982). The JIQ consists of 10 items with Likert-type scaling ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 6 (strongly disagree). Kanungo (1982:345) reported reliability coefficients of between 0.67 and 0.69 for the JIQ. In a South African study, Van Wyk, Boshoff and Cilliers (2003:63) reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.88 for the JIQ. This indicates that the JIQ can be considered an appropriate questionnaire to use to measure job involvement for a South African sample. A biographical questionnaire is included in order to enable a description of the population. It included biographical questions such as gender, race, age, years of service and highest educational qualification.

5.2 Research procedures

Two organisations in different industries gave consent to participate in the study. Both organisations provided the researcher with a list of employees employed by the organisation. Respondents included in the sample frame of each organisation had to meet the minimum requirement of having a Grade 10 qualification. The reason for this was that in order to mindfully complete the questions posed in the

questionnaire, and to provide reliable responses, the respondents needed to have an adequate literacy level. An introductory letter was attached to the questionnaire in which the objectives and aims of the research were clearly stated, and respondents were informed that the results of the study would be published. In addition, respondents were informed that participation is voluntary, and that participants could withdraw at any point during the study. Also, respondents were assured that their information would be kept confidential, and that they could complete the questionnaire anonymously.

Primary data was collected by means of self-administered questionnaires. According to Van der Walt and De Klerk (2014:384) this data-collection method is effective for collecting data on workplace spirituality, because it allows respondents the opportunity to reflect on questions before answering them. A total of 675 questionnaires were distributed and 412 questionnaires were returned, which equates to a 61% response rate, which can be regarded as a good response rate (Babbie, 2001: 256). The final sample consisted of 55.3% men and 44.7% women. The sample consisted predominantly of Africans (88.15). In terms of respondents' age, 53.6% were between the age of 40 and 59, 44.7% were 20-39 years old and 1.7% were 60 years and older. Most respondents have been in their current job for 1-15 years (79.9%). In terms of academic qualification, most respondents held a national diploma or degree qualification (58.5%) and only 5.6% indicated that their highest academic qualification was Grade 10 or Grade 11.

Data was analysed using the SPSS statistical package. Descriptive statistical analyses were performed to determine the measures of central tendency, including the mean, the standard deviation and minimum and maximum scores. Inferential statistical analysis included the Pearson product-moment correlation, and multiple regression analysis. The

Pearson product-moment correlation was used to determine the relationship between workplace spirituality and job involvement. A multiple regression analysis was used to determine whether workplace spirituality predicted the change in job involvement.

6. Findings

The descriptive statistics of the study is depicted in Table 1. As is evident from Table 1, respondents' mean score for job involvement was low (mean=2.83; SD=0.47). In a study by Govender and Parusamur (2010:242) the mean scores of job involvement for a South African sample was low to average.

Table 1: Descriptive statistical analysis for the scales

Variable	Median	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Job involvement	2.8	2	3	2.83	0.47
Workplace spirituality	3.05	2	4	3.03	0.28

The mean score for workplace spirituality (mean=3.03; SD=0.28) was average. In a study by Van der Walt and De Klerk (2014:385) the mean score was 45.7 for a South African sample, which is slightly below average. Thus, it appears as though the current sample reported a slightly higher level of workplace spirituality than the other South African population which consisted mainly of professional workers, such as psychologists, pharmacists, doctors and professional nurses. The results of the various Pearson product-moment correlations are presented in Table 2. The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient results shown in Table 2 indicate that there is a statistically significant positive relationship between workplace spirituality and job involvement ($p \leq 0.01$).

Table 2: Results of the Pearson product-moment correlations

Variable	Job involvement	Workplace spirituality
Job involvement	1	
Workplace spirituality	0.140 0.004**	1

** $p \leq 0.01$

The first objective of this study was to determine the relationship between workplace spirituality (the independent variable), and job involvement (the dependent variable). From the above data, one may conclude that workplace spirituality is positively related to job involvement. In order to determine whether workplace spirituality statistically significantly predict job involvement, a multiple regression analysis was performed. The results thereof are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Multiple regression analysis of workplace spirituality and job involvement

Variable	R	R ²	F	P	β	t	p	Tolerance	VIP
JI	0.023	0.021	9.799	0.000**	0.153	3.130	0.002**	1.000	1.000

** $p \leq 0.01$

The results shown in Table 3 reveal that workplace spirituality statistically significantly predicted job involvement ($p \leq 0.01$). Furthermore, 15.3% ($\beta = 0.153$) of the variance in job involvement can be attributed to workplace spirituality. These results show that when workplace spirituality increases, so do job involvement.

7. Discussion and Limitations

The results of the Pearson product-moment correlations (see Table 2) indicate that a statistically significant positive relationship exists between workplace spirituality and job involvement ($r=0.140$, $p\leq 0.01$). Similar findings have been reported by other researchers. In a study by Huang and Lin (2014:494), a positive relationship was reported between workplace spirituality and job involvement ($r=0.58$, $p\leq 0.05$). Pawar (2009:770) determined the relationship between the different components of workplace spirituality and job involvement, and reported that two of the three components, namely meaning in work ($r=0.39$, $p\leq 0.001$) and positive organisational purpose ($r=0.26$, $p\leq 0.001$) were related to job involvement. Milliman et al. (2003:440) indicated a positive relationship between workplace spirituality, specifically meaningful work and community, and job involvement. From these findings, one may conclude that if an organisation has spiritual values which are expressed by organisational leaders, it will lead to employees becoming more involved in their jobs. Mudrack (2004:492) states that if a person is involved in their job, he or she might feel morally obligated to do their job, in that they will do everything in their ability to overcome any obstacle that comes their way.

In order to determine whether workplace spirituality (the independent variable) predicts the dependent variable of job involvement, a multiple regression analysis was performed. The results of the multiple regression analysis (see Table 3) show that workplace spirituality predicts job involvement ($\beta=0.153$). This implies that workplace spirituality explains 15.3% of the variance in job involvement which signifies that workplace spirituality explains a large proportion of the variance in both job involvement. Therefore, one may

conclude that to enhance positive work attitudes, employees need to perceive that the organisation is spiritually based, and that the spiritual values of the organisation are lived by the leaders of the organisation.

The first limitation of the study is the lack of an agreed-upon definition for workplace spirituality. Although various reasons have been offered for the lack of conceptual clarity, it seems important that researchers in the field attempt to operationally define workplace spirituality. Furthermore, the absence of construct clarity may potentially have an impact on the results obtained in various studies; this makes the comparison between studies, or so-called meta-analysis, difficult. Secondly, although the ideal would have been to include a random sample, the researcher had to use a convenience sample due to time and budget constraints. Consequently, the external validity of the study is compromised. The results of this study should therefore be interpreted with caution, as they cannot be generalised to a wider population. However, the findings of the study confirm the importance of studying spirituality in the context of the workplace.

8. Conclusions and Implications

Spirituality in the workplace as a topic of scientific investigation has been neglected in for many years, and therefore there has been a lack of scientific research on workplace spirituality in the South African context. A relationship was established between workplace spirituality and the work-related attitude of job involvement. The current study elaborated on the research findings of previous studies, confirming the importance of creating spiritually based workplaces in order to ensure that employees are involved in

their jobs. However, organisations should realise that workplace spirituality cannot be used as a ‘quick fix’ to solve organisational problems, but should be implemented authentically, and lived by organisational leaders, if it is to have positive outcomes for the organisation.

Workplace spirituality and job involvement, it would have been interesting to determine whether job involvement is related to the subcomponents of workplace spirituality. It will also be valuable to investigate why certain individuals value spiritual workplaces more than others and what are the experiences of different employees in terms of workplace spirituality. Moreover, since it was established that workplace spirituality predicts job involvement, other work-related attitudes such as work engagement and organisational citizenship behaviour should also be investigated in order to establish whether workplace spirituality can be a predictor of positive work-related attitudes.

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