

The Moderating Effects of School Principals' Leadership Practices on the Workplace Spirituality and Leadership Effectiveness Relationship

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Abstract

Workplace spirituality and its relationship to school administrators' leadership effectiveness, is a compelling issue for educational management practitioners. This field of study is still in its infancy stage and have not given emphasis in Malaysian educational context. The purpose of this study is to identify the moderating effects of school principals' leadership behavior on the relationship between workplace spirituality with leadership effectiveness. Relatively, the data for this study was collected using a set of questionnaire from 989 trained teachers from 87 national secondary schools across three States of the Northern Peninsular of Malaysia. The findings revealed that the level of workplace spirituality practices in the Malaysian secondary schools was exceptionally high. Where the findings also showed concurrent adherence in supporting the hypothesis that, workplace spirituality is positively related to leadership practices which in turn is positively related the leadership effectiveness. Meanwhile, leadership practices was identified as the moderator of the relationship between workplace spirituality and leadership effectiveness. In addition to this, the results also confirms that the workplace spirituality leads to effective leadership practices which could enhance leader effectiveness in terms of higher commitment and departmental performance. As conclusion, this study recommends that the school administrators should fully exploit the role of workplace spirituality and leadership practices as a moderator in order to increase teachers' commitment and performance.

1. Introduction

The focus of creating positive environment towards developing all the avenues of producing excellence in school organizations, has been a pivoting issues concerning the education stakeholders, educationist and education administrators namely on the educational reform pertaining to the relationship between effective leadership and school improvement. Hence the research on both these premises; school effectiveness and school improvement highlights the importance of

leadership in the aspect of developing successful school and the changes [1, 2].

Relatively, in order to enhance and nurture successful transformation and excellence in schools, the school administrators are encouraged to work with teachers, empower them [3], get them involved as wholeness, connectedness toward work, and instilled deeper values [4], and initiative the team spirit which benefits the school as a whole [5]. Hence, it is believed that the spirituality entity would enhance the organizational learning [6], unify and build communities [7], serve the needs to connect with others at work, and to the work itself [8], and as the source of a healing and harmonizing expression, wisdom, and connectedness that transcends all egocentric, socio-centric, or anthropocentric forms [9]. Nevertheless, the emerging constructs such as transformational leadership which brings their spirituality elements to work, transform the organizations from merely a mission-driven activities into a place where individuals and collective spirituality are encouraged as well as the spiritual development is integrated into day-to-day work life.

Apparently, in the context is this study, spirituality at workplace are associated with the delighting experiences at workplace and the mental cohesion of the workers towards their work-scope [10,11,12,13,14]. The delighting experiences at workplace eventually funnels the workers to conceptualize the workplace as not merely a place to work or make a living but to perceive it as a place that provides and fulfils personal satisfaction in relation with Maslov's theory of needs [13]. Parallely, the spirituality concepts in the Malaysian educational setting have been receiving wide and popularity acknowledgement since 1996, and the spirituality concepts adheres here includes the following: consultation (musyawarah), collaboration (gotong-royong), excellence (al falah), personal refinements (adab), and accountability (amanah) [15]. The intention of disseminating these ideas together with other notions as "zero defect" was intended to ensure that educational administrators in Malaysia at all levels, share a collective managerial understanding to achieve the objectives of providing educational services that are excellent and of world class quality [16]. Through the formulation of these ideas, generic concepts are

drawn from the literature review as well as examples derived from other sources of implementation of this concept, whilst then adapted to ensure it is relevant accordingly to suit the Malaysian situation. The dimensions of examples found to be in relevance to Malaysian settings are such as “empowerment”, “caring schools”, and “caring educational services”. However, due to the complexity of the organizational characteristics of schools today, the educational managers are therefore burdened with varied workloads, like entertaining visitors, reading and answering letters.

No doubt, the findings from studies conducted have empirically proved that the practices of spirituality at workplace as a solution towards overcoming human capital development in a profit based organization, nevertheless, this matter was not given prior attention by researchers from the context of educational organization particularly in Malaysia. Adding to this, it was found that the scale utilised by the researchers from the previous studies in the west were apparently less supportive with local situation in Malaysia.

2. Workplace Spirituality and Leadership Practices

From the organizational perspective, workplace spirituality also described as “spirit at work”. Spirit at work is a term that describes the experience of employees who are passionate about and energized by their work, find meaning and purpose in their work, feel that they can express their complete selves, and feel connected to those they work [10,14]. Specifically, the experience of spirit at work is linked with increased creativity, honesty, trust, and commitment in the workplace, along with an enhanced sense of personal fulfillment of employees [12,13]. Relatively, it can be concluded that the meaning and implications of spirituality within the context of the workplace. It involves the effort to find one’s ultimate purpose in life, to develop a strong connection to coworkers and other people associated with work, and to have consistency (or alignment) between one’s core beliefs and the values of their organization [10]

Thus, within the context of an organization, [17] view climate as one of the transactional factors that contribute to motivation, which in turn affects individuals’ performance. [18] points out that subordinates find deeper meaning and rewards in the workplace when spirituality is part of the climate. Concurrently, [4,5] found that climate interacts with work orientation to predict employee job performance. Therefore, when organizations engaged with meaningful workplace spirituality practices, it would benefit individuals and organizations as well [5]. More specifically, individuals and organizations who perceived themselves as more “spiritual” are

more creative, productive, and adaptive, since work is connected to a bigger picture.

The role of leaders in nurturing workplace spirituality has begun to emerge its importance rapidly. As for the purpose of this research, definition of leadership [17] was referred to as “the art of mobilizing others to want to struggle for shared aspirations” (p.30). Leadership is a process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how it can be done effectively as well as about the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives [17]. Nevertheless, the understanding on how and why leaders succeed or fail to have positive influences on their followers is still a compelling question for researchers [18]. However, the emergence of integration of the terms spiritual and leaders were coined [19] to explain the entity of spirituality in context of workplace leadership and the attempt to validate this model in order to move this field towards a theory of spiritual leadership.

Hence, in relation to the theory of spiritual leadership, [20] in their empirical review of the literature on individual spirituality claims that spirituality is addressed through several new paradigms which include spirituality and leadership that relatively recognize leadership as the manifestation of a leader’s spiritual core [19], leadership as a collective phenomenon [21], and leadership as concerned with an individual’s thinking, inquiring, perceiving, valuing, and acting in a community rather than an individual context [22]. Along these lines of research, it suggests that the spiritual domain as an integral component of leadership and that puts forth spirituality as an important variable of the integrated leadership development model [23]. The premise of this integrated model advocates that development occurs when there is a transcending of worldviews and a shift towards higher levels of internal locus of control [23], and human growth is achieved through the interplay of individual, community, and environment.

In total, the literature review reveals that spirituality at workplace is strongly related to leadership effectiveness, but there is no empirical research done to prove this, especially in Malaysia. Meanwhile, there was also no research done elsewhere to prove that the relationship between spirituality and leadership effectiveness is moderated by leadership practices. Therefore, this study is exploratory in nature that attempts to establish the relationship between spirituality at workplace (WP) and leadership practices (LP), and also to establish the moderating effects of leadership practices on the relationship between spirituality and leadership effectiveness (LE).

3. Method

This study used a descriptive research design. The data were obtained through the administration of questionnaires to randomly selected trained teachers from National Secondary School in Malaysia.

3.1. Participants

Data for this study was collected from 989 trained teachers from 87 National Secondary Schools across three States of Northern Peninsular Malaysia, namely Penang, Kedah and Perlis. The pre-requisite for teacher's to participate as respondent in this study were of that these teacher must have worked for at least one year under the incumbent principals. The sample of this study consist of 78 percent female and 22 percent male teachers. Meanwhile 86 percent of the respondents were with working experience of more then five years.

3.2. Instruments

For the purpose of this study, a set of questionnaires were employed using five Likert scales measuring WP, LP, and LE. This questionnaires was mailed to teachers. In relevance to this, the workplace sprituality was measured using 20-items developed by [13] on five-point Likert-type scale. The 360-degree version of Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) of [24] questionnaire was used to measure the principals' transformational leadership practices. The LPI consists of 30- items, was measured through the use of a five-point Likert-type scale. The third section of the questionnaire measures the leadership effectiveness in terms of school outcomes and teachers' developmental results. This 13 items-scale which was constructed by [17] was scored using a five-point Likert-type scale.

4. Results

During the preliminary analyses, the t-test was performed to determine whether there were gender, years of working experience and type of school (grade A and B) differences with regard to the research variable (i.e., WP, LP and LE). The results revealed that there is no significant differences of research variables (i.e., WP, LP and LE) at $p > .05$. In additions, the correlations between the demographic variables and the research variables were marginal (below .09). Hence, the participants was treated as one group. Meanwhile, since the unit analysis in this study was at school level, therefore it was defined as the aggregate mean representing each school. Means, standard deviations and intercorrelations for the research variables are as shown in Table 1.

Through the examination of the means of subscales of workplace spirituality, it revealed that subscales sense of belonging to community was the highest ($M=4.37$) and followed by meaningful work ($M=3.91$) and coherent with organizational values ($M=3.67$). Therefore, it can concluded that the level of workplace spirituality practices in Malaysian National Secondary Schools was comparatively high based on [25] categorization. The Pearson correlation matrix revealed that all the three workplace spirituality subscales were significantly ($p < .01$) and positively correlated with leadership effectiveness (ranging from .37 to .49) and leadership practices (ranging from .32 to .42). Meanwhile, leadership effectiveness also positively correlated with leadership practices ($r = .42$).

Additionally, the multiple regression analysis as suggested by [26] was employed to identify the moderating effects of leadership practices on the relationship between spirituality and leadership effectiveness (see Table 2).

Table 1. Means, standard deviations and intercorrelations of research variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	S.D.
1. Meaningful Work (MW)	-	.				3.99	.65
2. Sense of Belonging to Community (SC)	.33	-				4.37	.49
3. Coherent with Organizational Values (OV)	.24	.33	-			3.67	.71
4. Employee Satisfaction and commitment	.37	.42	.35	-		3.81	.73
5. Departmental Performance	.49	.38	.39	.46	-	3.42	.59
6. Leadership Practices	.41	.37	.32	.42	.42	3.72	.65

Note: all variables are significantly correlated at $p < .01$

Variables 1-3 are subscales of Workplace Spirituality

Variables 4 and 5 are subsclaes of leadership effectiveness

Table 2. Hierarchical regression beta coefficients (β) values for moderator analyses

Variables	Satisfaction and Commitment			Departmental Performance		
	(Step1)	(Step 2)	(Step 3)	(Step1)	(Step 2)	(Step 3)
Independent variable						
Meaningful Work (MW)	.23**	.23**	.39**	.23**	.23**	.17
Sense of Belonging to Community (SC)	.32**	.29**	.26**	.32**	.23**	.42**
Coherent with Organizational Values (OV)	.36**	.36**	.23**	.36**	.37**	-.18
Moderating variable						
Leadership Practices (LP)	-	.11**	.31**		.27**	.36**
Interaction Effects						
MW x LP	-	-	.80*			-.73*
SC x LP	-	-	.54*			.60*
OV x LP	-	-	-.89*			.83*
R ²	.24	.25	.30	.24	.31	.37
Adjusted R ²	.24	.25	.29	.24	.30	.36
R ² Changes	-	.01	.05	-	.06	.07
F Changes	52.85**	18.10**	11.24**	52.85**	106.31**	15.81**

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

The findings from Table 2, shows that the work place spirituality and leadership practices has direct effects towards teachers' job satisfaction and commitment, as well as departmental effectiveness. Nevertheless by adding the interaction of workplace spirituality X leadership practices variables into the equivalent of 3, has increased the change of $\Delta R^2 = .01$ to $\Delta R^2 = .05$ significantly at (F value $p < .01$) in the teachers' job satisfaction and commitment. Concurrently in addition of the interacton of variable of workplace spirituality X leadership practices into the equivalent of 3 had increased the value of ΔR^2 to .01 significantly in the departmental effectiveness. Thus, it can be concluded that leadership practices has a moderating effects towards the relationship between workplace spirituality with leadership effectiveness (teachers' job satisfaction and commitment, and departmental effectiveness).

5. Discussions and Implication

In general, the findings from this study indicates that there is a high level of workplace spirituality being practices, which concretize the statements of [27] that Malaysian school teachers admits that their teaching career as a meaningful work in their life, able to create good relationship among peer teachers and accepting them as a part of family and adapts the school's aim and mission as of their own. Apart from that, the study also proves that the leadership of principals from the aspect related to genders, size of school populations and the locality of the schools is not the influencing factor to the high level of spirituality practices found in these schools. Moreover, it was found that the

dimensions of sense of belonging to a community to be highly practiced followed by the practices of the meaningful working dimensions and the dimension of coherence with organizational values. So, in overall, these findings provide an understanding that Malaysian teachers envisaged closely as a community that deploys close relationship by helping each other and protects one another as colleagues. Thus, the Malaysian teaching community with high level of workplace spirituality will have the capability to create and built a strong culture amongst them and accepts the member of their organization as a constituent of their own family.

In addition to this, the results from this research also revealed that, workplace spirituality correlates positively with teachers' satisfaction and commitment, departmental effectiveness, and also with effective leadership practices. In other words, if a school administrators were to have greater ability to lifts a spiritual "fit" in others, to understand the causes and allows the expression of employee's self workplace spirituality, then the teachers' would feel more satisfied and committed. As [28] said that the better the fit, the higher the like-hood that an employee will feel professionally and personally tied to (or embedded in) the organization. Besides that, the results also demonstrate that, leadership practices have predictive power over leadership effectiveness. These confirm the causal chain of effects as proposed by [17] which state that, principals with high workplace spirituality competency would exhibit effective leadership practices and these would in turn eventually, increases the employee's satisfaction and commitment, and departmental

performance. It appears that many of the benefits espoused regarding to the role of workplace spirituality pertaining to individual's leadership success and effectiveness need to be noted. As [6] claims that, the key to a leader's effectiveness and success in an organization is eventually depends on the leaders' efforts; leaders who see themselves as spiritual entities.

The findings also show that, a school administrator should play that role as a moderator in connecting workplace spirituality and employee and departmental performance. As an effective moderator, the principal should exhibit creativity in their leadership by forging the direction of the school, providing challenges to build the mind of the teachers, as well as a motivator to nurture the inspiration of the teachers, so that the teachers' satisfaction and commitment, and departmental performance would be improved. As an effective transformational leader, the principal also possesses and exhibits the values, attitudes, and behaviors that enables the member of the organization to experience a sense of belonging, meaning and making the differences towards their worklife.

6. Future Research

With the limited amount of definitions and empirical researches in the educational Settings, it is recommended to develop a more closely aligned definition of workplace spirituality. Another recommendation for future research is to explore the concept of workplace spirituality from a qualitative perspective. It may be that, workplace spirituality is difficult to measure in the quantitative perspective and a better understanding may be gained through looking at this differently. The nuances around individuals' behavior and approach to others could be explored through qualitative lens and would contribute additional knowledge to our understanding of how spirituality at workplace works in educational settings.

7. Conclusion

This study was intended to address the gap in providing a more informed link of the relationship between workplace spirituality and leadership effectiveness in the context of school principalship in Malaysia. The results of this study indicates that workplace spirituality has an important role to play as an aide to leadership development, and leadership effectiveness. Therefore, a better understanding of this construct from a multiperspectives, would provides a unique contribution to our understanding of individuals and their application in the field of Human Resource Development. Thus, this study also provides considerable insight into the use of workplace

spirituality as a predictor of effective leadership. It is hoped that, the educational administrators and Human Resource Practitioners involved in the training programs for educational leaders and school principals in Malaysia will able to assimilate this knowledge in their programs to enrich leadership knowledge for future.

8. References

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