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IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH OF WORKFORCE UNDER NEW NORMS THROUGH SPIRITUALITY

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ABSTRACT: In the new normal lot of changes are enforced at the workplace especially related to work in isolation and social distancing. These have become accepted norms. These norms are not only difficult to practice but they are also creating a lot of mental stress on the workforce. The paper aims at exploring various mechanisms for developing the individual spiritual strength thereby contributing toward better job performance and organisational growth under ethical leadership. Various solutions are being explored to facilitate individuals' protection from the inherent stress created by this pandemic. Organizations striving under ethical leadership and spiritual culture can have a better success rate in the new business norms. This analysis identifies the application of meditation and related techniques to help workers handle the mental stress of the new normal of various organisations. What are the new practices under the new norm? How they are being coped? How does psychological stress create a despondent workforce? How this despondency can be removed by virtue of spiritual practices? This all emerges out under ethical leadership and workplace spirituality.

KEYWORDS

New Norms, Transformation, Workplace Spirituality, Ethical Leadership, Spiritual practices, Meditation, Organization.

Introduction

The world changes continuously. When the change is referred it is tantamount to a transformation. In other words, change is a transformation. Transformation is a disturbance. The only thing which remains constant in this world is Change. Water flowing in the river or stream is fresh and new because it changes continuously. This water can be used for multiple activities and also can generate power. Whereas, water confined to a pond remains stuck without a change. This water is stinking and stale. Mosquitoes and diseases breed in such a stagnated water. Organisations which continuously churn themselves remain ongoing, fresh and powerful. New norms are being accepted amidst a transformation happening post pandemic. Transformation is very important to take forward any organisation through any changed perspectives. *"Social interaction, forming and shaping work relationships, is an important mechanism to understand how employees deal with contemporary large-scale organizational challenges on a day-to-day micro level".[1]*

Transformation

In the tough times of Pandemic, new norms have emerged which are quite sensitive for any organisation because of scare of death remains. Employees participation in protecting themselves from the effects of pandemic is being considered very important under the new norms. An employee who falls sick due to effect of mysterious virus will be a carrier leading to sickness at work place. Usage of mask (Personal protective equipment) is being promoted aggressively. Along with are arising the new norms like maintaining social distance (Safe act), restricted travel (safe act), closed offices (safe conditions), work from home (safe act), provision of soaps and sanitizers at workplace(safe conditions), Usage of Artificial Intelligence (Safe condition), promoting Video conference (safe action), issuance of written circulars/notifications/orders (Administrative control), avoidance of gatherings/ get together (Administrative control) and continuous sanitization of workplace (Administrative control). These disrupting changes are happening due to the pandemic which can be considered under New norms. Transformation is happening involuntarily. Organizations are incorporating such transformation through the employees' participation. Historically it is observed that organisations that endure and come out powerfully from such troubled times do emerge more powerful. Organisations that cannot endure such changes get wiped away. History has ample proof of the same.

"Digitalization and technological disruption, both of which are considered truly game-changing developments for entire industries, and by providing insights into the way in which employees factually cope with such environments."[1] Shifting of norm from Brick and mortar companies to click culture has brought tremendous societal change among employees within organizations. It is unfortunate that such a change is not being catered to by the old leadership and conservative management groups within any organization. This may be hidden slow disruptions or neglected uninvestigated near misses. Established practices do face organizational inertia and psychological resistance. *"Whether the translation of emerging practices such as digitization and global standards between the East and West experience lower translational hurdle"[2] is an area of introspection and research. Organisations exist in different cultures and contexts that provide specific perspectives for research and analysis. "Differences in various institutional forms and arrangements, and in philosophical and cultural orientations provide much explanatory power for understanding variation in how firms and other forms of organization behave and how they are understood by the various audiences they confront."[2]*

Organizations shifting towards Artificial Intelligence (AI), Internet of Things(IOT) and Machine Learning (ML). A disruption model is emerging which is directly or indirectly effecting the motivation and morale of the employees in any organisation. Digital Transformation is evident but it requires better understanding by *"disentangling DT and ITOT based on how value propositions and organizational identity interrelate in these processes."[3]* This is important because organizations need to define *"what they want to be and the interplay between digital technology and their value proposition".[3]* In the changed times, all organizations understand that digital transformation is very important in order to stay competitive. This transformation leads to a change in the way they do business or meet customer expectations. *"Based on literature and empirical findings, it is evident that there is a strong connection between digital transformation and corporate culture".[4]* It is true that organizations will change in order to remain surviving in the changed times. They have started investing in developing the managers, investing in digitization and transforming leadership capabilities. *"Organizations can enhance their chances of successful digital transformation, by using the frameworks presented to change the corporate culture. Organizations will thereby be able to develop their desired culture, suitable for the digital economy".[4]* Framework referred herein are Cultural change framework and Leadership development framework.

Although automation and digital transformation are the new realities organizations face resistance from employees who remain engaged with old practices. Learning organizations do take effective steps to engage employee engagement in such transformations. *"The dynamic marketplace requires employees to adjust successfully to changing policies and structures and operate effectively in the arduous environment, which in turn exert pressure on employees."[5]* In the changed norms organizations are getting the pressure to adapt to the changing perspectives. Organizations in these times must plan the development of the employees' development and engagement. The development needs to be from external and internal areas. Organizations feel the heat to transform themselves as per the marketplace to remain competitive. Leadership must strive diligently *"to invest in building learning organization to develop employee resilience, in general, to keep their employees engaged".[5]*

Leadership

Leadership has a major role in the contemporary organization undergoing transformation. Changes in the marketplace dynamics and workplace environment compels an organisation to inherently transform itself to stay competitive in the changed times. Changes within any organization becomes possible under Transformational leadership rather than under Transactional leadership. Transformational leadership is more dynamic and creative compared to Transactional leadership which is static and rigid. Transactional leadership is control oriented whereas transformational leadership is effectively engagement oriented. *"Leaders and employees in organizations need to be built up to participate in the process of change in their organizations. Organizations and employees also have the same interests that must be achieved so that followers will voluntarily engage in change. The best way is to focus on human resources as the capital asset for successful organizational change."[6]*

In every organization there are few individuals who influences the culture. Though they think differently, yet they make an impact on group behaviours. These leaders contribute to development of organizational culture in their own ways. *"Their commitment, dedication, and passion has had a powerful ripple effect and in turn, they role model, inspire, and lead their teams to excellence".[7]* Though Tranformational leaders initiate change through the employees engagement by promoting innovation and keep them motivated, yet it is the collective responsibility of employees. When it becomes a collective responsibility then the employee engagement is very essential in the transformed organization rather than the dictates of an individualistic leader. *"Organizational change leadership re-imagined is concerned with broader interests of ethics and what is in the interest of the wider society and organizations within it, rather than narrow sectional and individual interests of leaders."[8]* When ethics is involved then the role of Value system takes over. Organizational transformation by attuned value system takes supremacy then. For changing an organization an individual change must happen. *"Successful organisational change in this era of rapidly changing technology, globalisation, uncertainty, unpredictability, volatility, surprise, turbulence, and discontinuity begins with, and depends on, changing the individual consciousness of those who are employees of the organization".[9]* Individual employee consciousness can be impacted directly or indirectly by spirituality. Workplace spirituality leads to change of ethics and values in an organization. Aligning of Values cannot become the nodal cause to change the organization but it becomes the bedrock foundation to trigger such a change. *"It is through the implementation of a comprehensive values alignment process that it is possible for organisations to properly prepare the individual consciousness of its employees, and the organisational culture as a whole, to be able to constructively cope with the changes needed to ensure the organisation's long-term success and viability".[9]*

New Normal

Transformation brings with it resistance to change, disruption in existing systems, disorderliness in practices, change in human behaviour, structural re-alignments and systematic amendments of processes. Psychological impact on employees' morale and mental state also happens during any disorder created by transformation happening due to outside or inside environment. Present pandemic is such an event which has disrupted business cycles. Organizations are feeling the heat to survive in this changed environment and keep their employees safe. Death is ruling the roost as the spread of virus cannot be curtailed. Owing to the pandemic it loss of human lives, increase stress at workplace and permeating fearful environment can be evidenced. This can surely be a reason for an adverse effect on mental health in the workforce. Employees' engagement at the workplace under stressed times keep them reminded when insistence is upon wearing masks and maintaining social distances. These are the changed norms. Handshakes are avoided, Meetings are not promoted, Video conferencing is encouraged for interaction and Gatherings are stopped. Besides, most employees are encouraged to work from home or on alternate days from the office in isolation. This changed norm though precautionary creates a psychological stress on employees at workplace. Transformation has taken place in the Organisational behaviour. This pandemic has also resulted in unemployment and social isolation as a changed norm in the human civilization. Unemployment can lead to social and psychological problems. *"While the critically urgent issues of virus containment, treating of patients and vaccine development are being addressed, it is also mandatory to start addressing as soon as possible the long-term effects of destabilized mental health of global societies. Due to public health and outlined economic reasons, it is well recognized that COVID-19 presents a serious threat for mental health around the globe".[10]*

A new norm in society has brought tremendous changes in workplace and in organizational culture. Covertly it has developed shock, disappointment, anxiety and job loss threats. The pandemic definitely has created hidden risks impacting mental health of employees over long term. Uncertainty in markets, Poor plight of workers, continuous threat of job losses, work in isolation, maintaining social distance and Inability to get associated have created stress induced harmful psychological effects to the human brain. Pandemic has lead to bankruptcy of businesses, enterprise closures, workers' layoffs, depleting resources, collapsing of supply chain and lock down of existing systems. *"Since work has functions directly related to individuals' psychological health and self-esteem, job insecurity inevitably has implications to one's identity, self-efficacy beliefs, confidence and social support system. The threat is thus not only financial but rather multidimensional".[11]* In times to come the effects of Pandemic can effect Mental health of workers leading to Trauma due to job loss or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Spirituality & Mental Health

"The potential fallout of an economic downturn on mental health is likely to be profound on those directly affected and their caregivers."[12] Social distancing and loneliness are two different things. Human beings are social animals. With social belongingness any person can avoid the potential to inflict harm on self, protect oneself from suicide and retain emotional balance by sharing.   Prolonged loneliness can create a typical psychological disorder in the human mind. *It is not confirmed yet hypothetically assumed that "in the longer term, it is possible that SARS-CoV-2 will have persistent direct neurotoxic effects and immune mediated neurotoxic effects on the brain."[12]* Problem is the new norm which has the inherent potential to create an atmosphere which can lead to probable feelings of psychological disorder. Though this remains to be established from the present pandemic however it was proved from historical perspectives from research post various pandemics. Organizations need to work on developing employees engagement for a fruitful business environment but that is possible through promoting a culture based on spirituality under the ethical leadership. *"Strengthening the constructs of ethical leadership and workplace spirituality would prompt and cultivate the concept of work engagement among employees based on the trust they will have in the leadership and organizational environment."[13]* Such initiatives do make a change in any organization as employees

follow leaders. Spiritual and Ethical practices on part of leadership set an example of trust and positivity among employees. Such an amended culture then gets visible through the motivated behavior of employees, positive thought process in various stakeholders and value based customer relationship leading to enhanced response towards products and services. Organizations planning such cultural competitive advantage must engage employees and management practices based on spirituality and ethics. Self Determination Theory(SDT) which encircles around human motivation, inner growth and psychological requirements can be promoted further through workplace spirituality and moral leadership. Such organizations then transform themselves towards inner strength to handle inner and outer instabilities and to develop effective work culture. This transformation can then drive an organization towards effective reduction of costs thereby contributing to business profits.

"Focused attention, emotional balance, improved concentration levels, self-awareness, better relationships and enhanced well-being are benefits of mindfulness practices that are all important attributes needed to aid employee functionality in the workplace". [14] Mindfulness leads to reduction of stress, anxiety and depression. It also leads to increase of focus, attention and compassion. Such effects the enhancement of company's turnover due to enhanced job performance by engaged employees. Organizations can start with mindfulness related training sessions to send the message across the employees. *"In particular, mindfulness training played an important role in reducing employees' anxiety, burnout, distress, stress and increasing their awareness, motivation, positive emotion, resilience and well-being".[14]* Mindful meditation can be used to enhance cultural settings within the organization thereby leading to improvement in well being of employees. Studies have confirmed about *"the presence of a positive relationship between inner life and Work to Family Enrichment, which is believed to be the result of the self-understanding of inner intrinsic spiritual needs such as helping society, or the influence of religious perspective".[15]* Organizations can improve harmonious relationships under new norms in the workplace by helping their psychological well being. Psychological well being can be enhanced by motivating employees to practice spiritual practices as deemed in every religion and belief. *"Organizations (leaders) who invest in an employee's spirituality will help employees to achieve a positive well-being, which leads to positive organizational outcomes". [16]* Since these are the practices and leadership must set

an example. So it has to be messaged across along with various facilitated training programs and dissemination of messages dealing in with the practical application of spiritual exercises. Every person must be motivated to practice meditation at home. Just to begin with the first activity and the last activity of any day should be meditation. Sitting in silence after a brief prayer need to be persuaded in meetings and workplace. Such practices when get recorded in Minutes of meeting will spread the message across the workplace. Ethical practices can be imitated if practised by setting an example. Pedantic pedagogy doesn't help in such situations. Motivational spiritual messages can be displayed across the workplace. When people realise their true potentials, then get themselves engaged, thereby leading to the progress of any organisation. *"An awareness of the capabilities of oneself will help in creating an attachment towards his/her own work and workplace. Promoting workplace spirituality is a win–win situation for both, the organization and the employees. Knowledge is the primary source of competitive advantage for the organizations. Stimulating a sense of knowledge sharing among the employees is absolutely essential to thrive in this era of competition. Knowledge sharing among organizational members stimulates innovation and growth and also enables faster decision making".* [17]

Conclusion

Workplace spirituality can facilitate positive deliverable if individual belief and practices become stronger through knowledge sharing. Self aggrandizement, spiritual practices and information sharing intent are inter-connected with each other. The only solution during present times, wherein new norms are becoming common, it is always best to resort to developing of mental strength. Developing mental strength will lead to enhancement of individual capabilities leading to better engagement at work and better job performance. Resorting to meditation on daily basis at home and workplace will lead to inner resilience and mental strength. Meditation doesn't mean closing eyes and sitting at a place. A person can meditate while walking, sitting and working. Making work as worship also helps to gain strength in character and ethical power. Workplace spirituality is a covert derivative of this new workplace norm. This is the best prevention against the cure for depression, anxiety and stress. As the economy tries to stabilize itself, the businesses continue to thrive. In the world undergoing pandemic, the acceptable activities have become the new norm. This new norm may be a bit different but not difficult to adopt.

Organizations with uplifted workplace with inherent spiritual and ethical practices will be able to develop the best habits to practice. In the end, the show must go on.

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