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Celebrating Diversity through Spirituality in the Workplace: Transforming Organizations Holistically

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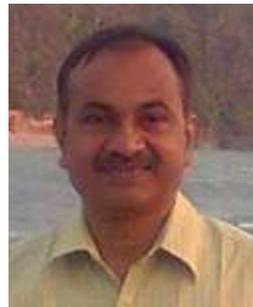
Celebrating Diversity through Spirituality in the Workplace: *Transforming Organizations Holistically*



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Abstract

Managing diversity effectively is the key to attract and retain a productive workforce. Research demonstrates that celebrating diversity leads to greater productivity, increased creativity, and heightened morale and motivation. Organizations often benefit from the differing perspectives and rich experiences a diverse workforce provides. Similarly, organizations can enhance their creativity by encouraging diverse perspectives and opinions. Thus, issues of managing diversity, valuing diversity, and celebrating diversity have assumed added importance. This paper suggests that diversity is not a problem, but rather a solution to most of the challenges organizations face such as employee engagement and participation. Managing workforce diversity effectively transcends meeting a company's legal requirements and complying with equal opportunity and non-discrimination regulation. Leaders need to understand and deal constructively with their own biases and prejudices that hinder diversity. Celebrating diversity is the extension of healthy spirituality that leads us to celebrate our differences and view diversity as different manifestations of the underlying Unity that permeates every phenomenon. This paper discusses key advantages of celebrating diversity, pinpoints barriers to organizational diversity, and offers some perspectives to overcome barriers to inclusiveness.

Introduction

Diversity of workforce plays a significant role in the expansion of business at the global level as it provides unique competitive advantage (Griggs, 1995; Jackson, S., 1991; Jackson, Stone, & Alvarez, 1993; Cox & Blake, 1991; Gilbert, 2000; Kramer & Barker, 1991). Organizations try to attract, promote, and retain a diverse group of people in order to sustain a competitive advantage (Gilbert, 2000) as diverse groups produce higher quality ideas, are more likely to make better decisions (McGrath, 1984; McLeod & Lobel, 1992), and will most

likely innovate at heightened rates (Bantel & Jackson, 1989, Cox & Blake, 1991, McLeod, Lobel, & Cox, 1996) – as compared to homogenous groups of employees. To Loden and Rosener (1991), diversity offers long-term advantages that include full utilization of an organization's human capital, reduced interpersonal conflicts, enhanced work relationships based on mutual respect, shared organizational vision and increased commitment of employees, greater innovation, and improved productivity (p 220). It also lowers costs associated with grievances, litigation, employee turnover, and ineffectiveness due to poor communication and dissatisfaction (Cox, 1997). Additionally, it enhances and fosters employees' creativity and problem-solving abilities. Business and organizations interested in surviving and thriving in the future need to leverage the competitive advantage of diversity within the workplace as "mono-managing destroys biological diversity...so does mono-managing similarity destroys diversity" (Kreitz, 2007). Diversifying experiences can influence creative development because of highly unusual and unexpected events or situations that push individuals outside the realm of normality (Damian & Simonton, 2014). Simonton (2017) presents his view on the relationship between diversity and creativity as follows:

In general, diversity is more conducive to creativity in both small groups and larger societal systems. But the exact relation is moderated by other factors. For example, in problem-solving groups diversity only helps when there's a strong emphasis on the collaborative attainment of common group goals. If the diverse members do not share the same goals, the group's creativity will suffer, albeit the individuals within that group may have their personal creativity enhanced by the exposure to alternative views.

Empirical studies regarding the effects of diversity on performance demonstrate positive attributes (Bantel & Jackson, 1989; Cummings, 2004; Lee & Farh, 2004), negative consequences (Fly, 2004; Williams & O'Reilly, 1998), or no relation at all (Kochan et. al., 2003). The researchers are of the view that diversity is a double-edged sword; it can result in social categorization-based stereotypes and biases (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) causing problems to organizational entry, career advancement (due to discrimination and reverse discrimination), and social integration of underrepresented groups; or it can lead to better problem-solving efforts and greater innovation and creativity levels (Boehm & Dwertmann, 2015; Ely & Thomas, 2001; Jackson & Joshi, 2011; Williams & O'Reilly, 1998). To Jayne and Diproye (2004), the increasing attention to diversity is not a fad but is an inevitable consequence of a global economy and demographic changes. However, it may generate dissatisfaction or cause conflicts and thus may not guarantee immediate tangible improvement. Ramasamy and Yeung (2016) studied the effects of ethnic and values diversity as well as their combined effect at a national innovation level and concluded that while ethnic diversity may negatively impact the workplace in certain ways, valuing diversity contributes positively overall. The countries that are ethnically homogeneous yet value diversity are deemed to be the best innovators as differences in mindsets, beliefs, and attitudes contribute towards better problem-solving and creativity. Consequently, increasing diversity is not only inevitable, but ultimately valuable and enriching. Therefore, questions of managing diversity, valuing diversity, and celebrating diversity must attract widespread discussion as well as critique.

Managing and Celebrating Diversity

As employment of people from diverse cultural, geographical, and ethnic backgrounds has become common, the problem of diversity has emerged. Organizations not only have to

assimilate and integrate, but ensure a work environment for a human to flourish. There are different meanings to managing diversity, working with diversity, valuing diversity, leveraging diversity, and celebrating diversity.

To Triandis, Kurowski, and Gelfand (1994, p. 773), managing diversity means changing the culture of standard operating procedures that require “data, experimentation, and the discovery of the procedures that work best for each group. It is more complex than conventional management but can result in more effective organizations.” To Kramar (2001, p. 62), “Managing diversity can be regarded as a process of management based on certain values that recognize differences between people and identifies as a strength but at the same time is directed towards the achievement of organizational outcomes.” Managing diversity involves being responsive to a wide range of people according to any number of distinctions: race, gender, class, native, language, religion, personal preferences, and work styles – enabling every member of the workforce to perform to his or her full potential (Cox, 1993) in order to transform the culture of the organization (Triandis, et. al., 1994).

Leveraging diversity aims to achieve competitive advantages by drawing the best out of competencies, networks, and knowledge-related differences by employing heterogeneous teams (Jayne & Dipboye, 2004; Andersen, 2007; Janssens & Zanoni, 2014). Though leveraging diversity increases innovation and improves the corporate image, the term carries a manipulative connotation as its focus is to exploit the resources of different employees.

Integrating diversity refers to adopting voluntary actions to address social expectations of the business by employing people of different backgrounds and accommodating their collective expectations such as allowing flexible working hours, promoting work-life balance, enlarging the recruitment pool, and awarding job titles. Though it leads to improved employee motivation and corporate image, it may produce conflict and result in practices of reverse discrimination when limited opportunities are funneled only to certain groups (Ravazzani, 2016).

Valuing diversity is a generic procedure designed to bring about greater understanding and acceptance of people of various backgrounds and proclivities (Thomas, 1991). Diversity valuation serves to empower or enable employees as well as to respect individual defining characteristics. This approach of valuing diversity involves a shift in beliefs and attitudes away from the mentality of “we are all alike” to one that is more open and inclusive such as “we are each unique and that is the source of our greatness” (Ewoh, 2013).

Leach, George, Jackson, and LaBella (1995) used the term “working with diversity” instead of “managing diversity.” To them, managing diversity does not mean controlling or containing diversity but “calls forth the challenge to be curious, to inquire, interact, reflect and experiment. It requires individuals to be respectful, curious, patient, and willing to learn.” Persons implementing diversity practices and policies know that they can only command respect – if they are respectful to others. They also exude a childlike curiosity as the embrace of multiformity enables them to experiment and interact with diverse people. They are patient and committed to listening to others expound innermost feelings and ideas. And, most importantly, they are always willing to learn and adapt accordingly.

Celebrating diversity in business means that businesses will be more profitable and efficient when diverse labor forces from different disciplines and cultural and ethical backgrounds contribute to operations. Celebrating diversity means engaging the heads, hearts, and spirit

of different members of the workforce to realize an organization's objectives. It also requires allowing differences to effect a meaningful co-existence. Genuine diversity pertains to unrestricted acceptance or, at least valuing other people and divergent opinions. Celebrating diversity points to the extension of a healthy spirituality that leads us to celebrate our differences and view diversity as different manifestations of the underlying Unity that permeates every phenomenon. It means seeing difference as opportunity and making the quantum leap to recognize that truth is multifaceted, perhaps infinite, and that there is no best or one way. To quote Zohar and Marshall (2004), "A full celebration of diversity means almost thanking God for the other's difference, because that difference enriches my own reality and opportunities" (p. 95). This is the extension of Ken Wilber's major rule in his *Collected Works Vol. 8* (2000):

Everybody is right. More specifically, everybody – including me – has some important pieces of truth, and all of those pieces need to be honored, cherished, and included in a more gracious, spacious and compassionate embrace (p. 49).

In the context of politics, scholars are debating the question as to whether diversity is a source of strength or leads to greater discord. Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam (2001) claims that diversity and social cohesion are negatively correlated. Contrarily, Scott Page (2008) and Vijay Kaul (2014/15) are of the view that greater diversity – if properly understood – can be a source of innovation, greater understanding, and harmony among groups. Capable and visionary governance and transformational leadership can direct diversity in developing different perspectives to seek solutions to socio-economic challenges.

A person who cannot celebrate diversity sees only his or her own perspective. This leads to a dictatorial leadership style that is counterproductive for the organization. On the other hand, transformational leadership based upon ethics and spirituality promises sustainable transformation of the organization and even whole nations as it can effectively engage people and harness their physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual attributes (Burns, 1978).

Lessons from Darwinian Perspective on Creativity, Adaptive Leadership, and Collaborative Spirit

Psychologists Donald T. Campbell (1960) and Dean Keith Simonton (1999) portend that creativity follows the Darwinian process of variation and selection. Nature is extraordinarily productive and creates many possibilities through blind "trial and error" and then lets the process of natural selection decide which species survive. In nature, 95% of new species fail and die within a short period of time. Similarly, the creative genius-artist or scientist generates a wealth of ideas, and then subjects these ideas to aesthetic or scientific judgment, selecting only those that have the best chance to survive and reproduce. According to this Darwinian perspective, creativity involves the conditions of variations with numerous genetic recombinations and mutations, subjected to some consistent selection mechanism and retention procedure that preserves and reproduces the variations so chosen (Simonton, 1999, p. 26). Similarly, as natural evolution retains and propagates the best genes through biological inheritance, the mental evolution filled with creative ideas requires enhanced memory and its connection with already stored ideas. This variation procedure, at some point, becomes essentially blind or random. At this stage, the mind eventually reaches the point where neither prior experiences nor current environmental circumstances will provide sufficient clues as to how to restrict the range of choices. Consequently, this process is

reduced to a trial and error procedure. The creative genius requires the unpredictable generation of a rich diversity of alternatives and conjectures through association with people from different backgrounds who can supplement his or her ideas. From this variety of options, the intellect retains the best ideas for further development and communication. To be truly creative, creativity needs some means of producing variation in ideas and this variation should be blind. Blind variation implies a departure from reproductive or retained knowledge.

The practice of adaptive leadership, as advocated by Ronald Heifetz (2009), refers to mobilizing people to tackle challenges and thrive through diversity. In evolutionary biology, the successful adaptation involves preserving the DNA essential for the species' survival, discarding the DNA that no longer serves its primary purpose, and creating a new DNA arrangement that enables the species to adapt and assimilate to its new challenging environment. For successful adaptation, leaders preserve the essential cornerstones from their organization's heritage and make the best possible use of previous wisdom and know-how. As organizational adaptation occurs through experimentation, the process of reproduction produces variations along with high failure rates.

From a procreant view, as many as one-third of all pregnancies spontaneously miscarry, usually within the first weeks of conception due to the embryo's generative ability. In evolutionary biology, nature acts as a fund manager and consequently diversifies the risk. Each species and conception constitute variants with capacities quite different from the rest of the population. By diversifying the gene pool, nature increases the chance that some species will have ability to survive in a changing ecosystem. The secret of evolution, thus, is its variation, often termed *collective intelligence*. In the same way, adaptive leadership diversifies the risk than being dependent upon few people or groups. It builds a culture that values diverse views and relies less on central planning and the intelligence of a selected few. As new adaptations significantly displace, reregulate, and rearrange the old DNA, adaptive leadership tries to eschew old patterns and assimilate new ones.

Dr. David Bohm researched the lives of Einstein, Heisenberg, Pauli, and Bohr. He noticed that the breakthroughs in quantum physics were the result of dialogue among various scientists. The major breakthroughs emanated from open, simple, and honest conversation among many scientists (Michalko, 2001). Similarly, the discovery of DNA's structure was the result of the successful collaboration of James Watson (microbiologist), Maurice Wilkins (X-ray crystallographer), Francis Crick (physicist), and Linus Pauling (chemist). The findings in science advocate diversity to harness heads, hearts, and the spirit of humanity.

Learning Organization

Diversity can be effectively utilized to build the organization as a learning organization. Organizations need to discover how to tap people's commitment and capabilities to learn at all levels (Peter Senge, 1990). For survival and success, members' learning and creativity should be enhanced and engaged. Therefore, the idea of a learning organization is assuming added importance: "Learning organizations are organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together" (Peter Senge, 1990, p. 3). A learning organization possesses continuous advancement mechanisms to meet its ever-changing

needs (Ali, 2012, p. 56), moves beyond “natural learning” to learning in rapidly changing and conflictual circumstances (Dodgson, 1993), and facilitates the knowledge acquisition of all program staff by grooming a positive and safe learning environment (Pinxten et. al., 2011, p. 626). It is aptly described as a learning laboratory dedicated to knowledge creation, collection, and control (Leonard-Barton, 1992, p. 23), or a place where knowledge is fully utilized, capacity is expanded, behavior is changed, and competence is gained (Liao, et al, 2010, p. 3792). Its values, policies, practices, systems, and structures support and accelerate learning for all employees (Bennett & O’Brien, 1994). The five dimensions that distinguish learning organizations from traditional organizations include the mastery of certain basic disciplines or “component technologies.” These include system-learning requiring the use of mental models and being open to one’s assumptions and internal pictures, personal learning and growth, building a shared vision, and team-learning (the process of aligning and developing group capacities).

Barriers to Managing Diversity

The main cause of cultural decline within an organization is the deterioration of its ethics. The corrosion of ethics acts as a barrier to developing diversity and often results in:

1. stereotypes and prejudice;
2. harassment;
3. envy;
4. discrimination and injustice;
5. a toxic environment;
6. organizational politics;
7. an unsupportive work environment; and
8. backlash.

1. Stereotypes and Prejudice

Stereotypes – “fixed and distorted generalizations made about all members of a particular group” (Loden, Rosener, 1991, p. 58), prejudices – harboring negative judgment about a particular group (Morrison, 1992, pp. 34-35), and conclusions – drawn without adequate knowledge or evidence – all act as barriers in the management and celebration of diversity. They result in either the systematic inclusion and exclusion of a particular group based upon characteristics such as gender, ethnic background, and nationality. However, while affirmative action laws (commonly used in the United States and known as *quota systems* in other countries) provide access to opportunities, they address little to deal with underlying prejudices and stereotypes (Morrison, 1992; Fiske & Taylor, 1984; Smith & Stewart, 1983).

2. Harassment

Workplace harassment has attracted attention for study since the 1980s. Scornful and vindictive attitudes, indifference, and utterance of carping words by bosses or colleagues destroy the inner well-being of an employee and consequently adversely affect his or her level of engagement, performance, and quality of life. As a result, the organization suffers diminishing team spirit and loss of morale; its workforce is deprived of organizational learning and creativity. Both the individual and the organization fail to perform to their peak levels and ultimately settle at below optimum (Leymann, 1990; Adam, 1992; Baraon & Neuman, 1996; Chappell & Martino, 2000). Thus, harassment – generally defined as violence against humanity – needs to be squarely addressed and abruptly halted. Such harassment may stem

from jealousy of others, a paucity of emotional maturity and sensitivity, lack of harmony in personal life extending to professional life, feeling of privilege guaranteed by organizational hierarchies or legal mechanism or political relations, lack of inner growth and elevation (and consequently egotistic attitudes), and the absence of self-control.

Swedish psychologist Heinz Leymann (1990) has catalogued different forms of harassment. They include:

- stifling self-expression;
- constant interruption and levying insults;
- criticizing work and private life habits;
- engaging in ridicule;
- mocking physical characteristics;
- mimicking gestures;
- attacking personal, political, or religious convictions;
- administering threats;
- ignoring another's presence or avoiding eye contact;
- staying silent thereby insinuating rejection;
- forbidding colleague interaction;
- eliminating social support or weakening it;
- assigning menial, unwholesome, or disparaging tasks; and
- forcing anomalous relationships.

Harassment can culminate in physical aggression, especially that of a sexual nature. In sexual harassment, the instigator/bully derives sexual pleasure out of harassing another, often with sadistic overtones.

3. Envy in the Workplace

Envy in the workplace is an inevitable and unavoidable phenomenon. The feelings of distress and discontent because of another's talent, level of learning, skills, resources, and attainments, are commonly experienced. Whether admitted or not, often because of fear of incorrectness, envy is the most pervasive and powerful of all the disruptive emotions among workers. Robert P. Vecchio (2001), who specializes in studying envy in the workplace, reports that 77% of employees surveyed have witnessed jealousy around the office within the past month. The undercurrent of jealousy is often manifested through the use of foul language, demonstration of negative attitudes, belittling of others through disrespectful gestures, and displaying overall arrogance. The reasons for such jealousy include competition for limited resources, vying for important assignments, gaps in talent and skills, and continuous comparisons between rewards and efforts.

4. Discrimination and Injustice

One of the most harmful unethical practices is discrimination faced by certain organizational members (Fernandez, 1993/1991). This discrimination may be on the basis of casteism, communalism, gender, regionalism, or other categories. The victims experience injustice perpetuated by others. If the leader or powerful group of the organization does not behave in an ethical manner, the power is likely to fall into the hands of cliques, coteries, and caucii that exert power over others and siphon resources. They eulogize their insignificant acts and seek back-patting and patronization from persons in power, typically remaining mute about

misdeeds and rationalizing them in cunning and manipulative ways. As a result, others experience unfettered and undeterred discrimination and injustice.

5. Toxic Environment

Another unethical practice is allowing the development of a toxic environment where certain members of the organization have to work under unfavorable conditions. These include manipulation through fear, setting unrealistic targets, defamation and debasement, putting others in untenable positions, and creating conditions of discomfort for others. When dominating groups exert power in unethical ways through the formation of cliques and coteries, they deliberately discriminate against person(s) of other groups by framing rules that set unfavorable and unmanageable targets for them. They do not hesitate to withdraw their comforts to deprive them meaning at work. As a result, the person(s) being victimized first resists through agitation, and, if not sufficiently addressed, become alienated from the organization. This toxic environment leads the person from a state of frustration to depression.

6. Organizational Politics

Organizational politics and a general state of de-valuation retard the process of managing diversity in an effective way. These “dis”-values include rumor-mongering, backbiting, corruption (misuse of power for personal gains – both materialistic and psychological – like harassment and humiliation), use of infamous “divide and conquer” methods, cheapness, meanness, opportunism, nepotism, concealing and deliberate misinterpretation of information, vindictiveness, use of alcohol and drugs, fits of anger, showmanship, formation of exclusive groups, fragile and calculative relations, eulogizing one’s insignificant acts and seeking rewards from persons in power, remaining mute regarding another’s misdeeds and rationalizing such inaction, accusing others and excusing oneself, exercising power by privileged groups, and wielding power in an arbitrary and vindictive manner. When leaders and their close team members work in unethical ways to attain positions of influence, the culture of the organization is bound to deteriorate. The above state of affairs reminds us a verse, *shlōka*, of *Yoga Vashishta* where Sage Vashishta describes to Lord Rama the manifold features of mind-full of *vāsanas* (passions) which are manifested and multiplied upon the assumption of power: “[F]ickle and habitually restless like a monkey, wanting fulfillment and satisfaction of endless carnal desires like drunkard persons, venomous like a scorpion and egoistic like demon” (Chakraborty and Chakraborty, 2013):

*Markatopam, madironmatta;
Vrischikena danshayeti;
Bhutagrasta vikaraschai;
Iti manah Rama!”*

7. Unsupportive Work Environment

An unsupportive work environment represents yet another barrier compromising the effective management of diversity. People of other regions or religions working in minority groups are often treated differently than their colleagues. For example, they may be excluded from luncheons, social events, and even informal gatherings within the office (Morrison, 1992). Additionally, they may not have access to information they need in order to make informed decisions. Therefore, the minority groups often work under fear of being marked as incompetent despite their laboring under enormous pressure to do outstanding work. Moreover, these people lack role models and mentors who can guide them by understanding

their feelings and emotions.

8. Backlash

Backlash is another barrier to managing diversity. Negative reactions to the attainment of power by people of certain religions or regions can be characterized as a form of backlash (Chemaers, Oskamp, & Constanzo, 1995). When certain group members within the organization are perceived as attempting to acquire power through either individual or collective means, such reactions usually happen. This type of backlash may be in the form of strikes or organized resentment. Typically, it occurs before power has actually been obtained by other groups as it is a reaction to the threat of loss of power by the minority group. Sometimes these organizations are accused of providing special treatment to certain group members.

Relishing Unity in Diversity through Spirituality

India's unique unity in diversity lies in her sacredness flowing from spirituality. India – the birthplace of different religious faiths including Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism – provides an inexhaustible source of spirituality among people. This spirituality advocates “Oneness of the Universe” as underlying unchanging reality, equality in ethical conduct stemming from realizing the divinity of other beings and serving them altruistically, tolerance, and a thorough understanding of other faiths. There is one ultimate and eternal source or universal consciousness with varied manifestations. As different beings are just the expressions of that universal consciousness, hurting the other means hurting oneself. This realization is the source of all philanthropy, ethical actions, and conduct. With this realization, one discharges normal and routine domestic and worldly affairs with a calm, collected, and caring mind. To Sri Aurobindo (1953):

Indian spirituality in its greatest eras and in its inmost significance has not been a tired quietism or a conventional monasticism but a high effort of the human spirit to rise beyond the life a desire and vital satisfaction and arrive at an acme of spiritual calm, greatness, strength, illumination, divine realization, settled peace and bliss (p. 90).

The spirituality can be applied to organizations using diverse workforces. To Zohar and Marshall (2004), “Companies that build spiritual capital celebrate diversity. They recognize that every point of view is necessary and that every point of view causes some validity” (p. 30). Spirituality is distinct from cult mentality or an institutionalized religion with social rites and rituals. It recognizes that the sacredness of every living organism is non-dogmatic and transcends all religions. It is reflected in the feeling of Oneness, interconnectedness, acceptance, and finding the meaning of life. Religion should elevate itself to spirituality and recognize the unique existence of everything. Organizations are now practicing spirituality in the workplace in one form or another. These spiritual workplaces “promote employees’ experience of transcendence through the work process, facilitating their sense of being connected to other in a way that provides feelings of completeness and joy” (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2004). Based upon phenomenological studies, Marques, Dhiman, and King (2007) define spirituality within the workplace as follows:

Spirituality in the workplace is an experience of interconnectedness among those involved in a work process, initiated by authenticity, reciprocity, and personal goodwill; engendered by a deep sense of meaning that is inherent in the organization's work; and resulting in greater motivation and organizational excellence (p. 12).

Another meditation practice associated with spirituality is mindfulness that requires a special form of awareness or presence of mind. As one practices mindfulness, that person comes to acknowledge his or her own imperfections and impurities that interfere with behavior and communication. As that individual becomes conscious of these imperfections and impurities, s/he tries to overcome those with focused attention. Mindfulness not only enables people to overcome their deficiencies, but also enables them to explore numerous dimensions of learning in life and its daily experiences. This mindfulness is regarded as a spiritual process in various spiritual traditions like Buddhism, Zen, Vedanta, and Sufism. It leads to equanimity that means maintaining inner calm, balance, and stillness despite experiencing the dualities of the external world which include the pains and pleasures of the body and mind, victory and defeat, and praise or criticism. Whatever the external situations and circumstances may be, equanimity helps to draw one's attention to inner silence and stillness. It means remaining steadfast and avoiding indulgence into attachment and aversion, and cultivating detachment and dispassion towards the changing world. This helps a person to self-evolve and aids in understanding the world in an objective manner.

This mindfulness is a form of self-awareness, self-observation, a process of bringing certain quality of attention to moment-to-moment experiences, while keeping one's consciousness alive in the present reality. Being mindful makes one more sensitive to subtle differences. Instead of lumping people into broad categories based on age, race, gender, or role, one makes finer distinctions within these classifications and discovers that there are new categories of people. Mindfulness helps to overcome one's tunnel vision that ignores potential solutions and opens one's eyes to other possibilities and perspectives emerging from the practice of diversity.

Role of Spirituality in Overcoming Negativity and Fostering Inner Growth

Spirituality encourages an individual's growth through the development of critical awareness by which one can grasp the hidden and existential meaning of different experiences and events. In *Man's Search for Meaning*, Victor Frankl (1959/2006) narrates the brutal cruelties of the Nazi torturers and exterminators. Among the guards of the concentration camp were sadists who used to take pleasure in causing others suffering. Yet the commander of the camp from which Victor Frankl was released was different. He used to purchase medicine for his prisoners from his personal funds. Through this example, Frankl shows that human kindness exists beyond the man-made demarcation of different races, hierarchies, friends, or foes. There are decent as well as indecent men and women in every group and no one group consists entirely of decent or indecent people. Frankl, bearing the authenticity of his experiences within a Nazi concentration camp, believes that the meaning of life is discovered in every moment of living – even in suffering and death. Where there is suffering, there is hidden existential meaning associated with that experience to be discovered by the sufferer. All people need to create inner spaciousness to become happy. They can employ spirituality to overcome suffering which is caused by such factors as harassment, envy, discrimination, and toxic environments. With this, there will be transformation in perceptions and attitude that help to embrace diversity.

Psychologists describe the personality of the perpetrators of harassment, injustice, and toxic environments as “excessively controlling, cowardly, neurotic, and hungry of power” (Davenport et al. 1999, p. 58) or “narcissistic personality disorder” (Wyatt and Hare, 1988) where

individuals need to obfuscate their own deficiencies (Leymann, 1993). Their threatened egotism and inflated self-appraisal compel them to direct their outward angers towards others to avoid individual remediation (Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1995 p. 5). But they might undertake the wrong point of view which is narrowly confined to the body-mind mechanism. With spirituality directed as self-realization, they can experience that the being is not confined to a body-mind mechanism, but rather the diversity that we experience is the manifestation of the Unity or Universal consciousness that permeates every being. Consequently, the other person who appears different is really the extension of one's own self or consciousness. With this realization, diversity as the manifestation of Unity can be effectively realized and celebrated.

Learning Organization and Spirituality

Spirituality underlies different disciplines of the learning organization. Recognizing the invisible fabrics of relations in the conceptual framework of knowledge and patterns is itself spiritual as we can experience the unity among diverse factors. Personal mastery is a discipline “of continually clarifying and deepening our personal vision, of focusing our energies, of developing patience, and of seeing realities objectively ... [It is] the learning organization's foundation” (Senge, 1990, p. 7). It is the discipline of mental models that start “with turning the mirror inward; learning to unearth one's own internal pictures of the words, to bring them to the surface and hold them rigorously to scrutiny” (Senge, 1990, p. 9) It is similar to spiritual practices of self-reflection and introspective analysis and of being mindful on a moment to moment basis.

The discipline of building shared vision requires understanding others empathically, making genuine and sincere commitments, and accepting others' ideas. This is again spiritual in itself because we are just a medium in the whole grand plan of the Existence as things are being operated through us. The discipline of team learning through dialogue is again spiritual *per se* as we keep ourselves like empty vessels ready for divine grace. We work with a team spirit of interconnectedness, collectively acknowledging that all glory belongs to the Lord.

In his book *Steps of An Ecology of Mind* (1973), U.S. biologist and philosopher Gregory Bateson presents four steps in a process of learning an action which denotes change. These steps can be configured according to hierarchic classification of the types of errors which are corrected in the various learning processes. These vary from “Zero Learning” – demarcated by acts not subject to correction, consequently producing no learning – to “Learning One” – characterized by the revision of a set of alternatives, consequently generating a level of minimum learning – to “Learning Two” – associated with a revision of sets from which the choice is made – to “Learning Three” – involving further revision. Thus, Zero Learning refers to the absence of learning, Learning One connotes minimal learning with the collection of information, Learning Two is critical and analytical, and Learning Three is holistic and intuitive. Cochrane (2000) compared and contrasted Bateson's model with Prof. S.K. Chakraborty's (1993) model of spirituality and management based upon values that move from secular to sacred, and from duality to equality to Unity and Divine Self.

Role of Transformational Leadership in Celebrating Diversity in Organization

Leaders need to recognize how collective engagement in a transformed environment of respect for diversity can uplift the organization. Transformational leadership that engages others to raise the level of motivation and morality with fused purposes (Burns, 1978) plays

a dominant role in the celebration of diversity due to a more empathetic approach in developing relationships (Johnson, 2003, p. 190), idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass & Avolio, 1993; Bass *et al.*, 2003). It produces certain positive conditions within the organizational setting that foster the construction of a moral and ethical workplace (Burns, 1978) and prevents a general decline into an odious and stressful work environment. A healthy work environment evolves from widespread social support, translating conflicts into challenges and opportunities for learning, expanding team spirit, and encourages shared vision and mutual well-being. This leadership flourishes on spiritual values such as integrity, honesty, and humility, and is demonstrated through reflective practices as well as the ethical, compassionate, and respectful treatment of others (Fairholm, 1996; Reave, 2005; Pruzan, 2008). It embraces altruistic love (characterized by forgiveness, kindness, integrity, empathy/compassion, honesty, patience, courage, trust/loyalty, humility and hope/faith) as reflected through endurance, perseverance, resiliency, redefining goals, and expectation of reward (Fry, 2003). Value-based leadership, deeply rooted in spirituality, plays a pivotal role in cultivating ethics and values among individuals, teams, and organizations who are then equipped to harness diversity issues creatively.

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