

Spirituality in Business: A Change in Perspective from Maximization to Sufficiency

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Abstract: This article provides a novel viewpoint on how contentment could be incorporated in corporate philosophy for being spiritual while functioning in a materialistic world. Spirituality has been viewed in this article as joyfulness or a state of true happiness arising out of contentment. A discussion on how this meaning of spirituality could go along with various perspectives of spirituality in businesses and how it could do away with various caveats of bringing spirituality into a business as laid out in existing literature has been done. It has been concluded that spirituality can coexist with materiality in business organizations by changing the perspective of the corporate mind from maximization to sufficiency where sufficiency in the present time may be determined on the basis of future requirements of sustainability. People toil day and night in search of happiness but are seldom happy. A moderation in viewpoint from maximization to sufficiency or contentment both in personal and professional lives could result in joyfulness and make life easy for everyone in the society.

Key words: business sustainability; contentment; happiness; joy; sufficiency; workplace spirituality

People have material needs as well as spiritual needs (Gleiser, 2010). Material needs could be in the form of food, clothing, and shelter (Sabino & Pulhin, 2021) whereas spiritual needs could be in the form of happiness (Porter, 2014). In the words of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, “I believe that the very purpose of our life is to seek happiness” (HH Dalai Lama & Cutler, 1998, p. 3). Material things are necessary for survival and leading a comfortable life with the ultimate purpose of achieving happiness. However, all efforts are directed towards material needs making them the primary motive of life. As a result, even after fulfilling material needs, people have a tendency to continue putting all their efforts towards materiality in the hope of getting happiness. Business organizations too, rest their focus on material goals. Material rewards are offered to employees for achieving such goals. Employees’ success in organizations is measured in terms of how much material rewards they achieve. Fame follows the biggest achievers in terms of materiality. Fame, therefore, itself becomes material and material wants of employees never get fulfilled. Could a person be truly happy while living in a materialistic environment? This article tries to provide a viewpoint on the meaning of spirituality and how it can coexist with materiality in modern businesses.

Meaning of Spirituality

Achievers feel pride upon their achievements and may confuse it with happiness. As soon as achievers accomplish an achievement, they embark upon another journey for the next milestone in order to be happy. As a result, achievers continue to achieve more material in their longing to be more happy. What they actually achieve is not happiness but pleasure. “True happiness relates more to the mind and heart. Happiness that depends mainly on physical pleasure is unstable; one day it's there, the next day it may not be” (HH Dalai Lama & Cutler, 1998, p. 21). True happiness is “stable and persistent. A state of happiness that remains, despite life’s ups and downs and normal fluctuations of mood, as part of the very matrix of our being” (HH Dalai Lama & Cutler, 1998, p. 24). This meaning of true happiness has been referred to as ‘Joy’ by Tolle (2001) who says, “Things and conditions can give you pleasure, but they will also give you pain....they cannot give you joy (p. 155). Pleasure is always derived from something outside you, whereas joy arises from within (p. 24)”. The same has been said by Seneca, as cited in Graver (2023) that “Do not judge yourself to be happy until all your joys arise from yourself”. “To be spiritual, means to experientially know, “I am the source of my joy”” (Sadhguru, 2020).

One can be more happy one day and less happy on other days but can’t be more joyful or less joyful. Joy can’t be measured. The sentence, “I am very happy today”, could be considered materialistic because happiness that varies in quantity is akin to pleasure (Dambrun et al., 2012). Pleasure may be understood as hedonic reward processes driven by a desire which can lead to a craving whereas happiness is a euthymic state implying a reposed mind resulting from contentment (Gros et al., 2020). When happiness is measured then more of it may be desired resulting in conversion of a spiritual need into a material desire. When people are truly happy or joyful, they don’t need anything more or the other way round, when people won’t need anything more, they will be truly happy or joyful. “Nothing can give you joy. Joy is uncaused and arises from within as the joy of Being” (Tolle, 2001, p. 155). The dictionary meaning of joy is “a deep feeling or condition of happiness or contentment; something causing such a feeling; a source of happiness” (Collins Dictionaries, 2014).

Happiness has been referred to as a calm lake and “our mood fluctuations are analogous to waves (hedonic experiences) and troughs (unhappy experiences)” (Kashdan, 2001, p. 332). Contentment makes people savor their life as it is thereby keeping erratic changes in mood at bay (Herzenstein and Gardner, 2009). Contentment could be found for enjoying life despite hardships

(Sandén *et al.*, 2015). This sense of contentment resulting in true happiness or joyfulness is what has been viewed as being spiritual in this article.

Balance between Materiality and Spirituality

People generally can think about spirituality only after achieving a level of material comfort. Iuliana (2020) has analyzed the impact that 'Material Comfort' has on the 'Sentiment of Life Fulfillment' and has concluded that material comfort has an influence upon the sentiment of life fulfillment. However when the impact was studied the other way round, it was found that the sentiment of life fulfillment has a stronger influence upon material comfort. When life fulfillment is felt then lesser material comfort could also suffice.

The story of a "Happy Man's Shirt", (*The Happy Man's Shirt*, n.d.) under moral stories for children, highlights that happiness is not dependent on how much you have but with how content you are. In this story, an otherwise noble and just king became sad and sick. Doctors diagnosed the problem and advised that the king should find a happy man in his kingdom and wear that man's shirt for treatment. The king asked his ministers and noblemen for their shirts assuming they were happy, but none of them proclaimed themselves to be happy. Everyone had some problem or other due to which they were sad. The queen ordered soldiers to go far and wide in the kingdom and fetch a happy man's shirt. The soldiers could not find any man who was happy before ending up with a poor skinny man in a cave in the mountains who was singing a song of happiness. When the happy man was taken out of the cave, everyone was astonished to see that the poor man didn't have a shirt. He had happiness in his heart and was content with what he had. Such stories are generally titled as moral stories for children but are more relevant for grownups.

Spiritual people have an inherent sense of contentment. Contentment, however, is a feeling which does not necessarily mean to stop earning or to remain poor. Joshi (2018) considers contentment as a "beautiful space where you feel happy and satisfied with what you have and where you are, and you want to move towards the betterment of that state" (p. 120). "Living in a hut or a palace is either about your choice or social and economic compulsions. It has got nothing to do with your spirituality" (Sadhguru, 2020). Iuliana (2020) has also studied the impact of income on the feeling of life fulfillment and has concluded that the two variables are not associated at all. "Contentment does not depend on what or how much you have but depends on how you feel about what or how much you have" (Joshi, 2018, p. 121).

Directing efforts for generating more in the future is necessary for progress and for making the world a better place to live. The important thing is to focus on what more we are trying to generate in the future and how we consume what has been generated. Instead of putting all effort on how to produce, we must learn more about how to consume and to appreciate what we have (Scitovsky, 1986, as cited in Emmons, 2020; Varma *et al.*, 2024). If we strive for only more material goods without the spiritual angle then true happiness or joyfulness would always remain a distant dream.

An important question that therefore follows is how can spirituality coexist with materiality? One of the ways could be to replace the term 'maximization' with 'satisficing' (Heshmat, 2015). Maximization is negatively correlated with happiness and maximizers are less satisfied than satisficers (Schwartz *et al.*, 2002). In a study done in Slovakia, it was found that the strategy of maximization is "positively related to depression and negatively related to happiness" (Vargová *et al.*, 2020). In a study done in the US, Western Europe and China, the results showed that when happiness is considered as dependent on a choice of more and more goods, maximizers feel lesser well-being and happiness as compared to satisficers (Roets *et al.*, 2012). Maximization requires generating or acquiring as much as possible whereas sufficiency requires deciding as much as is necessary. "The notion of sufficiency is particularly linked to questions about human needs and wants and the balance between these two that is just enough for a good life" (Jungell-Michelsson and Heikkurinen, 2022).

It is imperative that organizations think beyond material interests and include the experience of spirituality for a holistic development (Azevedo *et al.*, 2024). Spirituality can coexist with materiality in business organizations by substituting the objective of maximization with sufficiency of profit or wealth. Sufficiency is aligned with sustainability (Sandberg, 2021; Spengler, 2016). Operationalization of sufficiency in businesses can bring sustainable transformation in society (Beyeler & Jaeger-Erben, 2022). How much is sufficient today could be defined by what and how much is required for being sustainable in future (Dyllick and Hockerts, 2002). Sufficiency as a corporate strategy might appear to be strange or incompatible but it is not. Companies that pursue the strategy of sufficiency also aim at earning profit. Sufficiency however "forces businesses to think how to make do with less and still be economically successful" (Reichel, 2018). "It calls for the design of businesses and societies that are committed to responsible production and consumption, which is the key to achieving sustainable development" (Nathan *et al.*, 2024).

Spirituality in Business organizations

In a review of existing literature, three perspectives of spirituality in businesses have been mentioned by Karakas (2010) that is, Human Resource Perspective, Philosophical Perspective, and Interpersonal Perspective. Human Resource Perspective refers to the quality of life and well-being of employees in a business. This perspective says that incorporating spirituality at work reduces stress, burnout, and workaholism and increases employee morale, commitment, and productivity. Philosophical Perspective refers to the sense of purpose and meaning at work. It says that employees would perform better, be more productive and creative with

spirituality at the workplace. Interpersonal Perspective refers to a sense of belonging, community and connectedness and is centered on interpersonal relationships and social aspects of bringing spirituality to the workplace.

How these three perspectives align with spirituality as viewed in this article (in terms of ‘joyfulness’ or ‘true happiness resulting from contentment’, which in businesses could mean ‘substituting maximization with sufficiency’), needs to be looked into.

In terms of Human Resource Perspective, sufficiency of material wealth may be understood as earning that much wealth which does not hamper one's health and does not deprive one's family from that person's time of togetherness. Earning more wealth by sacrificing health or family time should not be considered as sustainable (Lopu and Ruiz-Castro, 2021). One reason could be that such a person would not be able to focus on work in the long run if there is degradation in one's health or due to work-life imbalance (S. and S.N., 2021). Another reason could be that such a person's spouse or kids or both may lose on their personality development (Molina, 2021) which, in turn, may hamper their ability to generate wealth for themselves in future. In either case, such a person would not be able to feel happiness in life.

In terms of Philosophical Perspective, people may best find purpose in their work when their work is in consonance with their deeply embedded life interests (Butler and Waldroop, 1999). For example, if someone loves to paint from the core of their heart and ends up being a painter, that person would find purpose in their work. A person who is creative and loves to read, write and help others in understanding what little that person has learnt would find purpose in being a teacher. People who love discipline from their core may find purpose in being a cop. If we assume that the purpose of work is the same as the purpose of life then it is to be happy and to be happy, one must practise compassion and be useful (His Holiness The Dalai Lama, 2021).

In the movie, “The Intern” (Meyers, 2015), Ben, a character played by Robert De Niro, chooses to work as an intern post-retirement. His purpose of working post-retirement was not to earn money but to achieve a sense of him being useful. People might work solely with the purpose of earning money or might switch to other organizations with the purpose of earning more money than before but money or more money might not result in happiness for them. Ben, in the movie, tries to make himself useful to the best of his ability. Whether it was in offering his services as a driver for his employer, Jules, a character played by Anne Hathaway, or by clearing the e-waste junked on a table in the office. While that was not his job to do, he was simply trying to be useful. When people help someone, they get contentment out of it. “Research has shown that altruistic behavior releases endorphins in the brain and boosts happiness for us as well as the people we are kind to.” (Joshi, 2018, p.85)

Instead of helping, colleagues often try to create hurdles for others in a bid to outperform them. When people do something to create problems for others they might aim at getting some form of contentment or pleasure. They may do so in order to take revenge for some previous act or to downgrade others in order to relatively upgrade themselves. However such pleasure will not result in true happiness or joy (Emmons, 2020). Outperforming others at the workplace “can be both interpersonally abrasive and psychologically taxing” (Dijkstra *et al.*, 2005). When people start recognising the act of outperforming others as their purpose at the workplace, their quest for being better than others refrains them from realizing the true meaning of work, that is, to be useful. Thus it is always suggested to forgive instead of revenge (Travers, 2022).

It is imperative to depend on cooperating with colleagues at work for being successful (Treadway *et al.*, 2011) and especially when people work as teams in organizations (Devine *et al.*, 1999). In competitive environments too, individuals would have to cooperate with their competitors for being successful (Milkman and Schweitzer, 2012). For cooperation in a competitive environment, competitors may help others in winning sometimes and in turn may win with help of such others at other times. Moving up with the help of others at the workplace may “provide people with a psychological buffer to face such situations” as well as “stimulate them to treat their peers prosocially, which may help limit the level of conflict” (De Waal-Andrews and Beest, 2018). This cooperative behavior is in tune with the concept of sufficiency instead of maximization. Instead of winning every time, one can limit their number of wins to an extent that may sustain cohesiveness in the work group. If there is a culture of helpfulness then it could “create a certainty of help being there independent of friendships and other relationships” thereby inducing contentment (Sandén *et al.*, 2015).

In terms of Interpersonal Perspective, humans are social beings and their relationships in society are important. Relationships of people with their immediate family, extended family, friends and colleagues tend to have an impact on their mental health and happiness. However joyfulness should not depend on our social relations (Sadhguru, 2016). “Mental joy sustains itself” (His Holiness The Dalai Lama, 2021) and therefore people who are inherently joyful will be able to maintain sound relations within the society.

Instead of expecting happiness from our relationships with others, we must first be happy and joyful ourselves. Happy relationships will follow. “If a person is happier, his or her family is happier; if families are happy, neighbourhoods and nations will be happy” (His Holiness The Dalai Lama, 2021). “Joy creates the urge to be playful and involves exploration and invention” (Herzenstein and Gardner, 2009) and as a result, joyfulness can create a ripple effect of happiness with better interconnectedness in society.

Caveats of Spirituality in Business organizations

Four caveats of “incorporating spirituality into the workplaces in the business world” have also been emphasized by Karakas (2010). The first and the biggest potential danger is that of “proselytizing other people from diverse religions, spiritualities and views”. Spirituality, however, should be understood as a concept that goes beyond religion (Schutte, 2016). Though all religions promote spirituality in their own way, the basic crux is the same across all religions (His Holiness The Dalai Lama, 2021). Care has to be taken while incorporating spirituality at the workplace that employers do not wrap spirituality in practices mentioned in any specific religion. To make this possible, the definition of spirituality to be adopted by a business organization should be such that it goes well with all religions. The definition of spirituality in the form of joyfulness or a state of happiness arising out of contentment, as understood in this article, may serve the said purpose.

The second caveat is that incorporating spirituality into “materialistic and positivist” corporate cultures could be considered completely incompatible (Mirvis, 1997). It is true that traditionally the objective of a business in the corporate world was to maximize profit and all efforts were made to earn as much as possible which is in tune with the materialistic culture. With changing times, the purpose of a business changed to wealth maximization along with corporate social responsibility and beyond (George *et al.*, 2023). This change is itself a step towards spirituality where businesses have started to think about the well-being of others including harmony in society (Singh *et al.*, 2015). Therefore spirituality cannot be considered as completely incompatible with corporate culture. What is now being strived for is the adoption of the concept of spirituality in a business absolutely. It appears hard to think of contentment in the corporate world because of the conditioning of the corporate mind over time. The corporate mind has accepted discussions on social responsibility and sustainability but find it difficult to accept that spirituality is at the core of it all. Until the workplace is understood only as a means to material end and not a means to true happiness as well, incorporating spirituality into corporate culture would continue to be considered as incompatible. A change in perspective from maximization to sufficiency might appear to be difficult but could make spirituality compatible with corporate culture.

The third caveat is that spirituality might become just a gimmick and may be used by management for manipulating employees or as a marketing tool. (Brown, 2003; Cavanagh, 1999; Milliman *et al.*, 2003; Mirvis, 1997). People play gimmicks or manipulate others when they want more than what they deserve and over a period of time, such gimmicks or manipulation become a part of their nature. When maximization is replaced with sufficiency, the desire to have more beyond reasonableness may get subsided along with the need to play gimmicks or manipulate others. If such a desire gets subsided, it is possible to change one’s nature towards spirituality. People do change over time and they could change for worse or for better. How people change would depend on the unique circumstances, opportunities and threats they face and the value system they carry to deal with life (Sagiv *et al.*, 2017; Nash, 2020; Feurer & Chaharbaghi, 1995). In a corporate culture of sufficiency, cooperative behavior instead of manipulation finds prominence among employees which could bring them to their natural state of joyfulness. “[Joy] is an essential part of the inner state of peace, the state that has been called the peace of God. It is your natural state, not something that you need to work hard for or struggle to attain” (Tolle, 2001, p. 155).

The fourth caveat is that there is much ambiguity in the concept of spirituality at the workplace. According to Markow and Klenke (2005), there are more than seventy ways in which spirituality has been defined. Dehler and Welsh (1994) define spirituality as a specific form of work feeling that energizes action. Other definitions of spirituality include “a process of self-enlightenment” (Barnett *et al.*, 2000), and “the unique inner search for the fullest personal development through participation into transcendent mystery” (Delbecq, 1999). Workplace Spirituality has been viewed as a multidimensional concept having personal, psychological and social aspects (Singh & Singh, 2022). Makkar and Singh (2018) found that spirituality has five dimensions namely Transcendence, Self Engagement, Self Efficacy, Self Awareness, and Service towards others. According to Walter (2024), workplace spirituality could be viewed in terms of Subjective Meaning Making Mechanism, Self-transcendation and Belonging. Pawar (2024) has identified eighteen workplace spirituality scales in a review article covering research done from the year 2000 to early 2023. Generally the definitions of workplace spirituality “at least contain the concepts of meaningfulness, completeness and joy, connectedness, and the experience of transcendence” (Schutte, 2016). Defining spirituality may become ambiguous and perplexing (Laabs, 1995) and therefore a simple meaning of spirituality in the form of joyfulness or a state of true happiness arising out of contentment has been considered in this article. “No matter what we possess or experience and irrespective of how we act, if we miss joy we have missed all” (Volf, 2015).

II. Conclusion

Spirituality may be understood as joyfulness or a state of true happiness arising out of contentment. True happiness is not a function of only the material. Achieving more and more material may give pleasure but not true happiness. Contentment does not mean to stop earning or to be poor. Earning is necessary but more attention is required on how to consume for a better future.

Businesses are generally viewed only as a source to achieve material needs and corporate philosophy is based on the maximization of profit and wealth. In materialist business organizations, spirituality can be introduced by changing the perspective of the corporate mind from maximization to sufficiency. Sufficiency is positively related to happiness and higher well-being as compared to maximization.

Sufficiency in the present time may be determined on the basis of future requirements of sustainability. Such an understanding of spirituality aligns well with the perspectives of spirituality in businesses and could do away with the possible caveats of bringing spirituality into the workplace as defined in the existing literature. Therefore, the simple meaning of spirituality as viewed in this article could coexist with materiality in modern business organizations.

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