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**Address:-Ashok Yakkaldevi 258/34, Raviwar Peth, Solapur - 413 005 Maharashtra, India
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Spiritual Intelligence For Effective Communication At Workplace

Swayamprabha Satpathy and Malavika Mohapatra

Dept. of Humanities & Social Sciences, ITER, SOA University

Abstract:

In this paper, the authors have probed into the spiritual perspectives of effective human communications at workplace by integrating various dimensions that are relevant to communication today.

Effective workplace communication is essential to the organizations' success. Our communication skills help us to understand not just words; we share meaning, emotion, feelings and attitude, in a fundamental drive to communicate. This emphasizes the process of coming to understand and share each other's point of view effectively; however there is also an intrinsic ability to misunderstand.

Human perceptions differ from individual to individual, thus we have multiple forms of communication, along with diverse theories and intelligences that govern the communication process. Yet at the core is the experience of the human spirit that guides, governs and tends all human behavior including communication. Hence this study primarily explores how workplace communication can become effective with heightened spiritual sensitivity and intelligence.

KEYWORDS:

Workplace Communication, Organization, Spiritual Intelligence, Human Behavior, Communication Skills, Effective Communication.

INTRODUCTION:

In day to day work as in life we are constantly communicating for achieving various purposes. This inherent habit to communicate and the skill to do it effectively are governed by various neurological, cognitive, social and psychological aspects which are different from person to person. However the very process of communication also embraces an inherent capacity for miscommunication. All over the world thousands of organization suffer from failed deals, loss of money and lost human and corporate relations due to miscommunication. The University of Colorado–Boulder cites as primary causes of workplace conflict “poor communication, different values, differing interests, scarce resources, personality clashes, and poor performance.”

OVERVIEW:

To communicate effectively is to give ourselves away, i.e. empty ourselves of ourselves (our opinions, our need to be right, our need to dominate, our ego, our securities, etc.), so that we have the space within to listen—to the person we are communicating with, and to the Spirit who gives us whatever words or gestures we might need to respond. Spiritual intelligence thus seems to merit, openness while simply communicating or communicating proactively and positively, listening with empathy and compassion,

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clear observation, and being graceful with both verbal and non-verbal communication.

Intelligence is defined as the ability to manage cognitive complexity. Webster's Dictionary defines intelligence as the ability to understand, to apply knowledge, to use reason skillfully, and to manipulate one's environment. This view that intelligence comprises many different abilities is supported by current trends in neurology and cognitive psychology. Spiritual intelligence is one of several types of intelligence that influences the way human beings conduct their lives. It refers to the ability to practice and integrate the spiritual polarities of intuitive wisdom and practical knowledge, love, responsibility, energetic action and humility. Spiritually intelligent people display spiritual maturity through their wisdom, compassionate action in the world, highest levels of any of the developmental lines, for example, cognitive, moral, emotional, and interpersonal.

This study explores evidence that establishes spirituality as a form of intelligence. The proposition that spirituality is a set of abilities and capacities that enable people to attain goals and solve problems in organizations and daily life is evaluated. People have the intrinsic ability to invest in virtuous behavior in everyday activities, events, and relationships with a sense of the spiritual, which improves their ability to communicate. Several components of spiritual intelligence at workplace are also identified. The paper further discusses various elements of human communication in general and workplace communication in particular, in the proposed light of spiritual intelligence. The purpose of this paper is to provide a spiritual intelligent view of the process of communication which should serve to establish effective workplace communication.

UNDERSTANDING SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCE

The history of the term Spiritual Intelligence begins with the theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI) that was put forth in 1983 by Howard Gardner. Neurologists and cognitive scientists only recognized two forms of brain neural organization before Singer and Gray's (1995) and Singer's (1999) work on unifying, synchronous neural oscillations across the whole brain. The first form was serial neural connections, which is the basis for human IQ and the second form was neural network organization, these neural networks are the basis for human EQ. The third component to these neural processes is SQ which according to Singer and Gray's (1995:555-586) research is called intuitive thinking, which allows the brain to question and consider the meaning and value of actions and existence (Zohar and Marshall 2000:12; Covey 2004:53-57).

In his paper 'Is Spirituality Intelligence? Motivation, Cognition, and the Psychology of Ultimate Concern' Robert A. Emmons (2000) looks at spirituality as a form of intelligence. He identifies spirituality as a set of capacities and abilities that enable people to solve problems and attain goals in their everyday lives. According to Emmons, spiritual intelligence is "the adaptive use of spiritual information to facilitate everyday problem solving and goal attainment."

"Zohar and Marshall (2000:3) state, "By SQ I mean the intelligence with which we address and solve problems of meaning and value, the intelligence with which we can place our actions and or lives in a wider, richer, meaning-giving context, the intelligence with which we can assess that one course of action or one life-path that is more meaningful than another." Zohar and Marshall (2000) regarded SI as more complete compared to EI (emotional intelligence) because other than being based on the emotions itself, SI is also based on human sociology and spirituality.

Spiritual intelligence emerges as consciousness evolves into an ever-deepening awareness of matter, life, body, mind, soul, and spirit. Attention to subjective thoughts and feelings, empathy, having the capacity to see things from more than one perspective and to recognize the relationships between perception, belief, and behavior are part of increasing awareness of the inner spiritual life. Being spiritually intelligent implies having a connection between the personal to the transpersonal and the self to spirit going beyond the conventional psychological development.

In recent years, numerous empirical studies have supported the idea that certain spiritual beliefs and practices are positively associated with physical and mental health. Practical applications of spirituality are finding their way into a wide range of human activities, which today requires a capacity for a deep understanding of existential questions and insight into multiple levels of consciousness.

SPIRITUALITY VERSUS RELIGION

Studies reveal that a key reason for not including the topic of workplace spirituality along with leadership and other theories of management practice appears to be due to the confusion surrounding the distinction between spirituality and religion. The new learning organization's demand on employee time and intrinsic motivation at work, require that to a certain degree, people must now satisfy their fundamental needs for spirituality at work.

The Dalai Lama (1999) made a clear distinction between spirituality and religion while looking for an ethical system capable of withstanding the moral dilemmas of the new century.

“Religion I take to be concerned with faith in the claims of one faith tradition or another, an aspect - is the acceptance of some form of heaven or nirvana. Connected with this are religious teachings or dogma, ritual prayer, and so on. Spirituality I take to be concerned with those qualities of the human spirit—such as love and compassion, patience tolerance, forgiveness, contentment, a sense of responsibility, a sense of harmony—which bring happiness to both self and others.”

According to Veach & Chappell “Spiritual concerns are separate from the concerns of any religious group and are not synonymous with those of religion.” “There is even the potential, if spirituality is viewed through the lens of religion, for it to be divisive in that it may exclude those who do not share in the denominational tradition or conflict with a society's social, legal, and ethical foundations of business and public administration” (Cavanaugh, 1999; Nadesan, 1999).

Spirituality reflects the existence of a relationship with a higher power or the spirit within that influences the way in which one operates in the world. The spiritual quest is one that emphasizes a dynamic process where people purposefully seeks to discover their potential, an ultimate purpose, and a personal relationship with a higher power or being that may or may not be called God (Tart, 1975; Wulff, 1996).

EXPLORING WORKPLACE COMMUNICATION

Social changes in the 20th century society can be ascribed to the expansion of states in general and their inherent political, economical and religious ideologies. Harriss (1992:8) is of the opinion that ordinary people too acted as active, conscious change agents in bringing about a general change in society. Harrop's illustrated history of the 20th century, along with discussions in Viola (1977), Neher (1997), Muller (2002) and Zohar and Marshall (2000; 2004) suggest the following human endeavors as well as environmental factors that transformed and redefined societies across the world.

The development of communication-related technologies and events characterizes the identified time period from 19th to the 21st century. For example, the time period from 1900-1914 was characterized by the propaganda of capitalist wealth that led to a social transition of families and communities from the rural areas to the city. The time period 1914-1929 was characterized by developing media that promoted city lifestyles, advertising campaigns about new or improved household products, and the rights of minority groups such as women and their diverse and unique interests, expectations and aspirations. The time period 1929-1945 was characterized by the introduction, and communication, of various legislations concerning family reproduction, and in addition to these legislations, debates about the subject of human rights and choices. During the period 1945 to the 21st century, communication technology developed at an increasing speed, and with it, an increasing demand for the freedom of speech.

As discussed above, dynamic environmental and social forces contributed to the changing behaviors, needs, motivations and attitudes of employees as also a need for change in organizational cultural and managerial practices in the workplace. These changes in the behavior, needs, and motivations of the new employee also mirrored a change in the communication between the management and new employee.

Therefore owing to the societal and lifestyle changes the new employer and employee has meaning-seeking needs which if neglected could lead to personality issues such as identity crises, low confidence, conflict, and deviant behavior such as disloyalty, unproductive activities and problems of absenteeism, which could be harmful for the organization. This implies that an understanding of environmental and societal changes and the needs and motivations of the new employee along with the role of intelligence in these changes, require a structure through which an understanding can be obtained. Managements thus have a primary responsibility to address the SQ-related needs and motivations of the new employee, and this can be effectively done through a spiritual intelligent approach. Thus according to Zohar (1997:135) a preferred structure through which understanding can be established, would be through the process of communication. Although communication has been studied since ages it

became a particularly important topic in the 20th century due to the swift changes in society, and the dramatic developments in communication technology.

In consensus with the above, Littlejohn (1996:2,6) and Steinberg(1999:1) argue that communication should be perceived as intertwined with all human life, and as such, any study of human activity needs to touch on the subject of communication. Littlejohn (1996:3) supports his point by stating that the ability to communicate at a higher level does not only separate humans from other animals, but reflects on communication as one of the most pervasive, important, and complex aspects of human life. It can then be argued in the above light that human communication is considered as a higher form of communication because it is influenced not only by the mind but also the spirit, which lends intention and meaning. Thus each communication has the intrinsic ability to be effective or ineffective depending on the spirit behind the expression.

According to Dr. Deborah Tannen, Professor of linguistics (Georgetown University Washington DC) "Communication isn't as simple as saying what you mean. How you say what you mean is crucial and it generally differs from one person to another, because using language is learned social behavior. How we talk and how we listen is deeply influenced by cultural experience. Although we may think that our ways of saying what we mean are natural, we can run into trouble if we interpret and devalue others as if they necessarily felt the same way we'd feel if we spoke the way we did."

Communication plays a vital role in the functioning of any organization. Organizational or workplace communication involves, talking, listening, nonverbal communication and communication using technology. Communication is thus an essential, continuous and inseparable process which requires extreme levels of effectiveness for the smooth functioning of the organization.

Thus the thrust is on the quality of communication, which should promote agreement, effective performance and development. Organizations therefore need to remove the barriers and implement steps for the smooth flow of communication at various levels within and without the organization. It should be interesting then to discuss how the nature and content of workplace communication is actually influenced by a factor such as spiritual intelligence.

The Organization and Spiritual Intelligence

Organizations are generally vary of dealing with abstract subjects like SI but research studies by Zohar and Marshall (2000;2004), Van der Walt (2003) and Visser (2004) argue that intelligences should be explored in an organization because it adds value to organizational performance . Littlejohn (1996:2, 6) and Steinberg (1999:1) say that "communication should be perceived as intertwined with all human life, and as a result should be explored in all human-related studies....". Fielding (2004:4) argues that the major purpose of communication is to coordinate and organize human behavior and thus it is "a transaction whereby participants together create meaning through the exchange of symbols." It is argued by Zohar (1997), Zohar and Marshall (2004), and Covey (2004), that in relation to human intelligence, spiritual intelligence is a primary variable in explaining behavior. Stephen H. Covey (2004): "Spiritual intelligence is the central and most fundamental of all the intelligences, because it becomes the source of guidance for other[s]..." Thus we realize that spiritual intelligence has already achieved increasing recognition as an important factor in the corporate world.

The objective with which communication is conceived, formulated and implemented in the workplace, could have a major influence on the perceptions, beliefs and attitudes of organizational members involved in the communication process. It can thus be derived that there is a relation between intelligence and the nature and purpose of the communication process. Therefore, spiritual intelligence is recognized as crucial in enhancing the effectiveness of workplace communication.

A Call for Workplace Spirituality

There is an urgent and accelerating call for spirituality in the workplace. A person's spirit is the vital principle or animating force traditionally believed to be the intangible, life affirming force, in self and all human beings (Anderson, 2000). It is a state of intimate relationship with the inner self of higher values and morality as well as recognition of the truth of the inner nature of people (Fairholm, 1997). Companies as diverse as Taco Bell, Pizza Hut, BioGenex, Aetna International, Big Six accounting's Deloitte and Touche, and Law firms such as New York's Kaye, Scholer, Fierman, Hays & Handler are

extolling lessons usually doled out in churches, temples, and mosques (Mitroff & Denton, 1999). People, as part of their spiritual journey, are struggling with what this means for their work (Mitroff & Denton, 1999).

It is well established in other disciplines in the social and physical sciences that, almost universally, people have the intrinsic drive and motivation to learn and find meaning in their work, and to be a member of a group in which they feel valued for their contribution to the group's performance (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003). People now find themselves spending the vast majority of their waking hours at work. The office is where more and more people eat, exercise, date, and drop their kids and even nap. Today people lack continuity and connection in so many other settings that many naturally look to their organizations as a communal center (Mirvus, 1997). Recent polls have found that American managers and leaders want a deeper sense of meaning and fulfillment on the job—even more than they want money and time off. (L.W.Fry)

Key Elements of Spiritual Intelligence at Workplace

SELF AWARENESS AND SELF CONTROL

Self awareness is essential for developing spiritual maturity and an essential element for personal development and developing communicative competence. When attention is directed inward, a person may begin by trying to attend to subjective sensations, feelings, and thoughts. At first, one is likely to be completely preoccupied with personal issues, unable to quiet the mind even for a minute. Fascination with personal melodramas and stories can be a distraction if one is attempting to focus attention or cultivate choice-less awareness. Like psycho-therapists who are trained to witness other people's stories with full, non-interfering attention it seems evident that when people attend to one another with a quiet mind, in the light of spiritual intelligence, old wounds are healed and hearts are opened. Attention can be voluntarily redirected and can begin the process of undoing old habits of thought and patterns of behavior. Being with others in silent meditation can also have a healing effect. When one is drawn to deeper contemplative practices by a longing for wholeness and understanding, a spiritual path unfolds, leading gradually to spiritual maturity. Some qualities that tend to be associated with spiritual maturity include loving kindness, honesty, tolerance, open-mindedness, and inner peace or equanimity in the face of life's existential challenges- these are all important elements of effective workplaces communications and interactions.

MATURING IN INTERPERSONAL SENSITIVITY

Spiritual intelligence lies in developing intrapersonal and interpersonal sensitivity. Paying attention to subjective thoughts and feelings and cultivating empathy is part of increasing awareness of the inner spiritual life. Spiritual intelligence depends on the capacity to see things from more than one perspective and to recognize the relationships between perception, belief, and behavior. Most people are expected to take responsibility for behavior but not for beliefs or perceptions, although these are intimately interconnected. Perhaps spiritual intelligence can also help a person discover hidden wellsprings of love and joy beneath the stress and turmoil of everyday life. Spiritual maturity also suggests a subjective sense of insight and understanding based on the willingness to recognize illusions, to love in the face of impermanence, and to come to terms with existential freedom and mortality. It implies a depth and breadth of vision that encompasses a whole spectrum of perspectives and multiple modes of knowing. Furthermore, spiritual maturity implies connecting the inner life of mind and spirit with the outer life of action and service in the world. All spiritual scriptures, therefore, preach us to see God in each other. Seeing the goodness in each person, in fact, lets people recognize goodness within themselves. It is spiritual maturity that truly sharpens the way we communicate.

BRIDGING CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Developing spiritual intelligence includes and transcends personal growth, extending to the farther reaches of healthy psychological development. Some personal characteristics that could be associated with spiritual intelligence are the traditional virtues of veracity, humility, and charity, which could also be described as authenticity, respect for differences, and the willingness to engage in service to others. A person may belong to any religious group, but with the development of spiritual intelligence the

circle of empathic identification expands to all people and takes the well-being of the whole into account; something which is of much relevance in today's culturally diversified workplace. When we recognize our interconnectedness and interdependence, it becomes possible to view the world from multiple perspectives. Of course, these traits can also be found in psychologically healthy people who do not consider themselves particularly spiritual. In other words, they can be considered necessary but insufficient conditions for spiritual intelligence.

CLARITY, CONNECTION AND ENTHUSIASM

Spiritual experience, like inspiration (Hart, 1998), is commonly associated with feelings of clarity, connection, opening, and energy. To be inspired in work is to be in the spirit; to be dispirited is to feel separated and discouraged. When one is inspired by a work, one feels refreshed, revitalized, and renewed. Spiritual growth often begins with inspiration and can be described in religious terms as a process of purification or in psychological terms as movement up Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Walsh, 1999). Roger Walsh described seven practices common to world religions that foster opening the heart and mind and help people attain happiness, emotional transformation, love and gratitude, ethical living for peace of mind, attention training for concentration, the awakening of spiritual vision, and wisdom and service; all very important elements of effective communication in workplace.

DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE PERSONALITY

One can always tell a person's good or bad character by the way he employs language. When speech is used judiciously, it is as strong as silence. Sometimes when people speak, we feel we are in the womb of great silence. Their words carry us to this realm of silence. We feel so much at peace with ourselves. In fact we seek their company. Speech that comes from the heart unites hearts and generates a greater sense of affinity among people. When these virtues govern our choice of words, and when our words are spoken in the appropriate place, at the appropriate time, to the appropriate people, then freedom of speech reaches its zenith. All the above are characteristics of an effective personality, who can be great leaders and efficient workers.

WORKPLACE CONSCIOUSNESS AND COMPETENCE

A spiritually conscious employee is enlightened, enjoys inner peace or self-realization and develops healthy competition for self and others.

The spiritual path is a metaphor for the development of spiritual qualities, including spiritual intelligence. A spiritual path may emphasize ascent to higher states of consciousness and self-transcendence or descent into communion with nature and body awareness (Wilber, 1995). The integral yoga of Sri Aurobindo (1976), the 20th-century Indian sage, regarded the attainment of transcendental freedom as a necessary but insufficient goal of practice. His philosophy holds that ascent to the divine is only the first step. A further goal is descent of the new consciousness for world transformation. Followed with commitment and integrity, the path can lead from the bondage of unconsciousness to spiritual freedom, from fear and defensiveness to love and compassion, and from ignorance and confusion to wisdom and understanding (Vaughan, 1979).

CHERISHING FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND AVOIDANCE OF ABUSE

Communication is effective when speech is free from sarcasm, hurting no one, never provoking ridicule or wounding deeply. Impulsive, uncontrolled speech may seem attractive in the beginning, but the end result is dreadful. Speech which is free from agitation, haste, guile or false hope, doubt or deceit is free from fault and hence it is pure and effective. Such speech leads to true freedom and certainly contributes towards effective communication.

Among the many freedoms people cherish, freedom of speech ranks high. It is all about communicating without ego. The ability to distinguish short-term pleasures from enduring happiness evaporates. Freedom of speech is the experience of internal freedom from the myriad inhibitions that restrict an individual from communicating effectively in social and professional settings and

communicating with responsibility and restraint. However, freedom of speech is a rich subject to contemplate. The ultimate goal of effective interpersonal communication, whether it is a workplace or a social setting is not only about conveying a meaning, an idea and the manner it is conveyed but is attaining peace, love and happiness at the end of each interaction. Spiritual intelligence is the ultimate intelligence that provides freedom, freedom of speech. Hence effective communication requires total connection with the soul and adeptness in using the words carefully.

DEVELOPING COMPETENCE IN COMMUNICATION

Communication is the vehicle that allows people to work together. In our society, our learning process is based on learning to communicate. When we go out into the world, most of us have not learned how to communicate with our peers for the purpose of achieving something beneficial for all of us. Learning to listen to others and really hear them, speak the truth - our own truth, and come together in a human understanding leads to powerful productivity for all involved. Whether a personal relationship or a work relationship, one of the most important skills anyone can learn are good communication skills. While effective communication is a learned skill, it is more successful when it's spontaneous rather than formulaic. A speech that is read, for example, rarely has the same impact as a speech that's delivered spontaneously.

Competent communication combines a set of skills including nonverbal communication, attentive listening, the ability to manage stress in the moment, and the capacity to recognize and understand one's own emotions and those of the person they are communicating with. Of course, it takes time and effort to develop these skills and become an effective communicator. From the foregoing discussions we come to realize that spiritual intelligence is capable of contributing seamlessly towards spontaneity in effective communication. Spiritual intelligence comes about through the spiritual practices such as meditation, contemplation, exploration of truth and conscious effort towards building inter-personal and intra-personal relationship. The more effort and practice one puts in, the more competent, instinctive and spontaneous one's communication skills become.

CONCLUSION

This inquest into spiritual intelligence for effective communication in workplace suggests that SI is an essential intelligence and when attained empowers knowledge needed for the integration of the inner life of mind and spirit with the outer life of work in the world. All communications take place through words, signs, and gestures. The discussions above also indicate that this intelligence is something which can be cultivated through questing, inquiry, and practice. Spiritual maturity does exist in the hearts and minds of men and women everywhere and when expressed through words and compassionate actions sharpens and moderates our communication contributing towards psychological well-being, overall personality development and effectual personal as well as business communication.

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