

Spiritual Intelligence and Employability Skills – An Empirical Study among Business School Students in Kerala

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Abstract

India witnessed a mushrooming growth in management education and there has been a remarkable focus and success on building capacity in this arena. Formal training in business frameworks and concepts along with industrial exposure were determining factors of employability in earlier days. Later cognitive, functional and people skills became the major indicators or the key success factors to fit into the highly dynamic corporate sector. In future there will be a pressing need for world-class organizations capable of coping with highly turbulent, complex conditions and unpredictable events which places a premium upon the capabilities of management students to address and respond to a more or less constant flow of new situations characterized by high levels of uncertainty. Over the last few decades, theories of multiple intelligences broadened our concept of intelligence beyond intellectual, emotional and social perspectives to include existential and spiritual intelligence. Spiritual intelligence is concerned with finding meaning and purpose of life, living in relation to others and emphasizing the full potential of every human being. This is an empirical study analyzing the relationship between spiritual intelligence and employability skills among management students. The data was collected from 120 MBA students using structured questionnaire. The analysis shows there exists a significant positive relationship between spiritual intelligence and employability skills. The implications for practice as well as scope for further research are also discussed.

Key words: Consciousness, Employability, Potential, Spiritual intelligence.

Introduction

India witnessed a mushrooming growth in management education and there has been a remarkable focus and success on building capacity in this arena. A valuable graduation in management course is considered as an ultimate shift from education to professional life. The Indian management education grew so wildly few years back when demand was very high that supply overshoot demand by a long straw. The unexpected and dramatic scenario at present is that many who pass out from colleges wander off. B- Schools in India have to do considerable thinking and envisioning so that the students are employable in a global market place by being responsive to the dictates of a highly volatile environment. Formal training in business frameworks and concepts along with industrial exposure were determining factors of employability in earlier days. Later cognitive, functional and people skills became the major indicators or the key success factors to fit into the highly dynamic corporate sector. In future there will be a pressing need for world-class organizations capable of coping with highly turbulent, complex conditions and unpredictable events which places a premium upon the capabilities of management students to address and respond to a more or less constant flow of new situations characterized by high levels of uncertainty.

The paradigm shift in management is proclaimed in such a way that the most innovative and successful organizations will be those that derive their strength and vitality from adaptable, committed team players at all levels and from all specialties; not from the omniscience of hierarchy. One of the ways to search this alternative paradigm is going back to our roots - the spiritual dimension of human beings; the dimension concerned with finding and expressing meaning and purpose, and living in relation to others and to something bigger than oneself. Development of each individual's full potential is the goal of emphasizing spirituality in the workplace. Even though spirituality in organizations was overlooked in the earlier days it has now become an accepted focus of academic research. Considerable academic and popular literature demonstrates the need for spirituality in the workplace. The initiatives in the corporate world such as Ford Interfaith Network, Woodstock Business Conference and Speaking tree; the focus of leading business schools including IIMS towards integrating management and spirituality while organizing conferences; efforts of leading management practitioners and academics to start Management Centre for Human Values, ISOL, VFIM etc. confirms that 'spirituality' is not at all a taboo in the business world.

Over the last few decades, theories of multiple intelligences broadened our concept of intelligence beyond intellectual, emotional and social perspectives to include existential and spiritual intelligence (Wigglesworth, 2012). Spiritual intelligence is concerned with finding meaning and purpose of life, living in relation to others and emphasizing the full potential of every human being. This study focuses on identifying the relationship between spiritual intelligence and employability skills of management students.

Employability

The word employability implies the ability to be employed and hence different from actually being employed. Over the past years the definition of employability shifted from demand-led skill sets towards a holistic view of softer, transferrable skills and person-centered qualities in conjunction with subject-specific knowledge, skills and competencies. Knight and Yorke (2003) defines employability as a set of achievements-skills, understandings and personal attributes that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and successful in their chosen occupations, which benefit themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy. "Embedding employability into the core of higher education will continue to be a key priority of Government, universities and colleges and employers." (HEFCE, 2011, p5) The employability skills are very influential in ensuring the success and progress of a company or industry. In the case of management education employability plays a broader role in contributing to economic growth as well as in social and cultural development. Employability is a life-long process; applies to all students whatever their situation, course or mode of study; complex; is about supporting students to develop a range of knowledge, skills, behaviors, attributes and attitudes which will enable them to be successful not just in employment but in life; is a nation-wide responsibility, and is about making the components of employability explicit to students to support their lifelong learning.

Higher Education Academy, UK points out that employability is not about replacing academic rigor and standards, not necessarily about adding new modules into the curriculum, not just about preparing students for employment, not the sole responsibility of Career Department or Placement Department of an institution and is not something that can be quantified by just single measure. The emphasizing on employability is not just preparing students to be successful in labor market. Dearing (1997) linked employability to the acquisition of skills for life. Hillage and Pollard (1998) says in simple terms employability is about being capable of getting and keeping fulfilling work, and comprehensively employability is the capability to move self-sufficiently within the labor market to realize potential through sustainable employment. After reviewing existing literature and instruments(SCANS, 2001; The Conference Board, 1996) for measuring employability skills this study concentrated on seven

employability skills; communication, teamwork, leadership, critical thinking and problem solving, ethics and morality, technology utilizing skills and social skills.

Spiritual Intelligence

Gardner (1983) defined intelligence as the ability to create an effective product or service, a set of skills that make it possible to solve problems, the potential to find or create solutions for problems, which involve gathering new knowledge. Over the last few decades, theories of multiple intelligences broadened our concept of intelligence beyond intellectual, emotional and social perspectives to include existential and spiritual intelligence. Zohar (2000) maintains that there are multiple intelligences, but all our possibly infinite intelligences can be linked to one of the three basic neural systems in the brain and all intelligences are equally variations of the basic rational intelligence (IQ), emotional intelligence (EQ) and spiritual intelligence (SQ). While rational intelligence is about thinking and emotional intelligence is about feeling, spiritual intelligence is about being. Bowell (2005) distinguishes three Qs stating that IQ is the intelligence that seeks to understand the 'what', EQ is the intelligence that seeks to understand 'how' and SQ is the intelligence that seeks to understand the 'why' of things. Spiritual intelligence is the central and most fundamental of all the intelligences, because it becomes the source of guidance for others, being an integrating intelligence, linking our rational and emotional intelligences.

Spiritual intelligence is concerned with finding meaning and purpose of life, living in relation to others and emphasizing the full potential of every human being. Spiritual intelligence is the ability to apply, manifest, and embody spiritual resources, values, and qualities to enhance daily functioning and well-being. Wigglesworth (2012) defines spiritual intelligence as 'the ability to behave with wisdom and compassion, while maintaining inner and outer peace, regardless of the situation.

Brewer (2008) states that spiritual intelligence is available to everyone; yet a handful, ever, take advantage of it. Embracing spirituality would not impel us to denounce the material world, near and dear one. Spirituality is not just proceeding to mountains or jungles and engaging in rigorous routine of praying and meditating the whole day. It's quite normal to lead a life of house holder or professional or student and being spiritual. Many people use spirituality and religion interchangeably. Religion is a specific set of beliefs and practices usually based on sacred texts and represented by a community of people. Many people though religious are low on SQ. Draper (2009) believes that overly religious people are not always the most spiritual. Most studies prove that there may or may not be positive correlation between being religious and being spiritual. Zohar (2000) professes that conventional religion mainly constitutes externally imposed set of rules and beliefs.

Spiritual intelligence is measured using five variables; consciousness, grace, meaning, transcendence, and truth. Consciousness is the ability to raise or shift consciousness, to tap intuition, and to synthesize multiple points of view in ways that enhance daily functioning and wellbeing. Grace reflects inner-directedness (combining discernment and freedom) and love for life, drawing on the inspiration, beauty and joy inherent in each present moment. Meaning reflects the ability to experience meaning, link activities and experiences to values, and construct interpretations in ways that enhance functioning and wellbeing even in the face of pain and suffering. Transcendence indicates the ability to align with the sacred and transcend the egoic self with a sense of relatedness and holism. Truth is the ability to be present to, love, and peacefully surrender to truth, manifesting open receptivity, presence, humility, and trust.

Relationship between Spiritual Intelligence and Employability Skills

The profound change in values globally has brought a growing social consciousness and spiritual renaissance. The society seeks spiritual solutions to ease tumultuous social and business changes. High SQ gives a person the ability to discriminate, to operate beyond the boundaries, gives a moral sense, an ability to temper rigid rules with understanding and

compassion and an equal ability to see when compassion and understanding have their limits. People with high SQ feel more fulfilled finding deeper meaning and purpose of their lives. They operate from positivism, put in their best efforts, deriving joy in helping others and improving the society by using a higher dimension of intelligence. Since those with SQ are able to employ their IQ and EQ better, they are creative, adding value to own and others' lives (Singh and Sinha, 2013). Those with high spiritual intelligence develop certain spiritual values like compassion, humility, forgiveness, gratitude etc. (Bruzan and Tony, 2001; Switzer and Bob, 2011). Emmons (2000) draws on Gardner's definition of intelligence and argues that spirituality can be viewed as a form of intelligence since it predicts functioning and adaptation and offers capabilities that enable people to solve problems and attain goals. Researchers suggest a relationship between spirituality, life purpose and satisfaction (George et. al, 2000, Friedman et. al, 1991). Trott's (1996) study of 184 employees in a Fortune 100 company indicated positive correlation between spiritual well being and general self-efficacy.

Levin (2000) suggests that the development of spiritual intelligence requires the recognition of our interconnection to all of life, and the capacity to utilize perceptual powers beyond the five senses including our intuition, which is seen as another level of consciousness and intelligence beyond analytical, linear and rational thought. Emmons (2000) proposes five components of spiritual intelligence: ability to utilize spiritual resources to solve problems, ability to enter heightened states of consciousness, ability to invest everyday activities and relationships with a sense of the sacred, capacity for transcendence of the physical and the material and capacity to be virtuous. Spiritually intelligent people are capable of using multiple levels of consciousness in problem solving and are aware of interconnection of all beings (Vaughan, 2002) and this is certainly helpful for effective leadership and people management.

Methodology

This empirical study is conducted among students of B schools with the objective of analyzing the relationship between spiritual intelligence and employability of management students. A structured questionnaire was distributed among the respondents to measure spiritual intelligence. Spiritual intelligence was measured using Integrated Spiritual Intelligence Scale (Amram and Dryer, 2008), short form, self-report instrument with 45 items. Integrated Spiritual Intelligence Scale (ISIS) has shown satisfactory factor structure, internal consistency, test-retest reliability and construct validity (Amram and Dryer, 2008). The respondents have filled the statements in Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 where 1 denotes strongly disagree and 5 denotes strongly agree. Employability skills were rated by the class-in-charge of respective respondents. The employability survey items were obtained after detailed literature investigation and constituted 7 employability skills. The sample was drawn from the students pursuing MBA in regular mode in the affiliated colleges of Mahatma Gandhi University located in Pathanamthitta District of Kerala. The questionnaire was distributed among 150 students, 132 surveys were returned, however, 12 of them had missing values and hence excluded. Finally the valid responses reached 120. After gathering the data, descriptive and inferential statistical analysis was carried out using SPSS version 21.0. Reliability test, correlation and regression analyses were performed focusing on the relationship between spiritual intelligence and employability.

Analysis and Results

The features of the data were described using descriptive statistics which provided a summary about the profile of respondents. The average age of respondents was 23 years and a majority of 57.5 per cent (69/120) was male. It was found that 50.8% of the students had a graduation in business or commerce prior to joining MBA.

After reliability analysis it is found that the data can be trusted. Internal consistency reliability was checked and the resulting Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.78 to 0.95. Through

correlation analysis (r values ranging from .801 to .894) it is found that there exists positive significant correlations at 0.000 level between spiritual intelligence and each of the employability skills. The correlation analysis shows that as the spiritual intelligence of students varies there occurs a change in their employability. Therefore if the B schools are interested to work on the employability of students spiritual intelligence of students must be taken care of. Correlation analysis gives the result of whether the variables change together or nor. In order to measure the intensity of variation, a regression analysis has been done. The model is found to be significant at a level of 0.000. The regression model showed how more the level of employability increases up by spiritual intelligence and found that constructing a link between spiritual intelligence and employability is meaningful to the students of B schools. Additionally, dimensions of spiritual intelligence can explain 79 per cent of the total variance of employability which is the R square value of the output. Since the R square is .79 the regression model is adequate enough to explain the dependence of employability on spiritual intelligence.

Limitations

This study is limited to post graduate students doing 2-year MBA program in regular colleges located in Pathanamthitta District and affiliated to Mahatma Gandhi University. The study did not cover management courses such as BBA, BBM, PGDM, numerous other diploma and certificate courses provided in B schools. The mediating and moderating role of demographic characteristics of respondents were also not considered. The study is to be repeated with different sample sets before generalizing the results.

Implications for Future Research and Practice

Our education system should adopt methods and methodology for management course to imbibe spiritual values among students. Meditation, spiritual workshops, spiritual forums, conferences and seminars with the theme of spirituality can be organized by institutions. This study can be extended in future towards various directions such as analyzing the role of educational institutions in the linkage between spiritual intelligence and employability skills, replication studies among students in other geographical regions or doing management courses other than MBA, identifying the factors contributing to spiritual intelligence and the mediating/moderating role of teacher qualities in the relationship between spiritual intelligence and employability skills.

Conclusion

This study is to engage all seriously discussing the revamping of management education as a prelude to excel in the viable global economy. Though we consider the matter of spirituality in an angle of human beings seeking spiritual experience, the fact is that we are actually spiritual beings seeking human experience. The ultimate source of our innate power can be tapped to full in order to enhance students' potential which may equip them to be better managers and leaders.

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