Research Paper: Spirituality’s Relationship to Job Satisfaction

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Abstract

Recent studies suggest that spirituality may affect the level of one’s job satisfaction. This student attempts to examine the relationship between spirituality and job satisfaction and determine whether or not spirituality does make a difference. A small control group of public service employees in a Florida library setting were surveyed for this study.
Hypothesis

This study hypothesizes that if spirituality is related to job satisfaction, then respondents with a higher sense of spiritual well-being will have a higher level of job satisfaction. This hypothesis is based on a theory that dispositions create a certain level of satisfaction regardless of one’s job.

Variables

The study’s independent variable is spirituality. For the purposes of this study, spirituality is defined as the participant’s perception of the quality of his or her source of values, meaning, purpose and connection to a spiritual being. The dependent variable, job satisfaction, is defined as the participant’s perception of the quality of his or her job experience.

Literature Review

What causes job satisfaction, the situation or the person? When Staw and Ross (1985) examined this question, they found that job attitudes were highly stable across various situations. They studied the correlation of job satisfaction ratings of workers over various time intervals, controlling for changes in employers and occupations. Their findings indicate that job attitudes are more a function of the person than the situation. However, just two years later Gerhart (1987) conducted a large national probability sample. This study predicted current job satisfaction from prior satisfaction, pay, and job complexity. The outcome showed that pay, status and job complexity predicted current job satisfaction over and above the effects of past job satisfaction. These results counter Staw’s suggestion that job design changes will not affect job satisfaction. These contradictory results might leave some to conclude that job satisfaction may be a combination of both situational and dispositional factors. As interest and research grow, more studies point to some relationship between job satisfaction and dispositional variables. And,
recent research has been conducted on the specific effect of spiritual well-being on job satisfaction. This student’s research is based on the theory that job satisfaction is indeed influenced by a person’s disposition, in particular by one’s spiritual health or well-being.

But how does one measure spirituality? This student found that much effort has been given to design effective assessments. Researchers have often measured spirituality with awareness that it does not necessarily have a religious denominational connotation. Spirituality has a vertical (God) dimension and a horizontal (family, nature, significant others) dimension (Ellison & Smith, 1991). Ellison (1983) produced a Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS) made up of two dimensions, Existential Well-Being (EWB) and Religious Well-Being (RWB), each of which were measured by answers to ten questions. Thirteen years later, The JAREL Spiritual Well-Being Scale (JSWB) was developed in order to assess spirituality in older adults and was used as a nursing diagnosis instrument (Hungelmann, Kenkel-Rossi, Klassen, & Stollenwerk, 1996). The JSWB consists of 21 questions: 11 focused on self, 4 on others, 5 on the Transcendent and one that does not appear to fit any spiritual domain (“I prefer that others make decisions or me”). Hungelmann, Kenkel-Rossi, Klassen and Stollenwerk (1996) explain that this “model of spiritual wellbeing [reflects] harmonious inter-connectedness of the major themes of time and relationships.” While this research helps establish how to measure spirituality, it does not indicate a connection between spirituality and other aspects of one’s life.

Accordingly, Csiernik and Adams (2002) maintain that not enough “empirical” study has been devoted to including spirituality in measures of wellness. Csiernik and Adams (2002) define spirituality as “our perception of ourselves, an adherence to values, of being ethical, and being connected with others, while maintaining a belief system that typically includes some religious dimension.” In their non-random sample taken from people attending a death and dying
conference in London, Ontario and Canada, 154 workers from 7 work environments took the JSWB scale along with other measures of wellness and job satisfaction. The study received a 34.3% response rate and found that spirituality helped to counteract stress in the workplace. They noted “a majority of respondents also indicated that workplace stress impacted negatively upon their spiritual health” (Csiernik & Adams, 2002). Given the sample frame, this student questions whether or not these results can be generalized. The question expressed by Csiernik and Adams (2002), is simply how to integrate spirituality into one’s work in order to improve job satisfaction and wellness.

Four years later, Robert, Young and Kelly (2006) measured spiritual well-being, existential well-being and job satisfaction using Ellison’s Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS). They had 200 respondents fill out the SWBS and the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire Short Form. For the purposes of their study, Robert, Young and Kelly (2006) define spirituality as including “searching for meaning and purpose in life, living by a set of values and beliefs, making a contribution in the world, and transcending oneself.” Their results indicate that spiritual well-being, religious well-being, existential well-being and job satisfaction were linked. Interestingly, the strongest positive correlation was between job satisfaction and having purpose or meaning in life. According to Robert, Young and Kelly (2006), “spiritual well-being was a stronger predictor of job satisfaction than was religious well-being.” And, they generously point out that the study may not be generalizable because they took their sample from a single region and religious (Catholic) background.

In 2007, Clark’s research aims to improve care for the dying, and his study examines whether spirituality is related to job satisfaction among hospice workers. 215 workers (nurses, aides, doctors, chaplains, social workers, etc.) were surveyed. They completed the JAREL
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Spiritual Well-Being Scale (JSWB), the Chamie-Case Spirituality Integration and a Job Satisfaction scale. Clark (2007) found that spirituality more likely improves job satisfaction when the worker integrates their spirituality at work.

Moreover, this student finds that the interest in this topic isn’t limited to researchers alone. In fact, a kind of grassroots “groundswell” (Pierce, 2002) seems to be occurring. U.S. Catholic Magazine’s Augustine Pierce penned a piece on the topic, using the dissatisfied employees in the popular comic strip Dilbert to illustrate his point. Pierce admits that he reads Dilbert and finds it funny. However, he also sees Dilbert as a “sad” commentary on people who perceive work as “hell,” a place where nothing is sacred. Pierce (2002) suggests that “the difference between the gang at Dilbert and those of us who actually like our jobs has very little to do with the specifics of our work.” Further he invites Dilbert and his kin to try a new approach, not necessarily joining a church but rather trying to find spirituality in their work. He suggests that “[Dilberts] take seriously the idea that God is present in the hustle and bustle of the daily workplace” (Pierce, 2002). And, in What Would Buddha Do At Work? authors Metcalf and Hateley (2001) suggest a myriad of ways to become an “enlightened” worker. Their book proposes that self-awareness and connectedness with others can in fact create a better work experience. They focus on items like integrity, honesty, commitment and respect. These are the same qualities that continue to emerge in various assessments of spirituality.

So, what should we make of this trend? Marc Gunther (2001) of Fortune magazine evaluates the notion of bringing spirituality into the workplace. First, he interviews members of a group called Business Leaders for Excellence, Ethics and Justice, that promotes the idea to “work from your soul.” He then attends a business school conference that opens with Tibetan bowl chimes. And, he goes on to question faith-in-the-workplace founder, David Miller, who
says God can be found in the workplace; the Hebrew word for work, “Avodah,” also means worship. Gunther contemplates what he calls the breaking of the last business “taboo” (2001) in the workplace. He wonders if spirituality on the job is just the latest fad of the baby boomer generation or if it has a lasting place in the work arena. And just what are the implications of bringing spirituality into the workplace? David Miller responds, “this is about who you are, your being, your character within the organization” (Gunther 2001). And, how does this spirituality manifest itself when tough decisions have to be made? Merger expert Jose Zeilstra explains it as “encouraging executives to look up from their spreadsheets to focus on people and values, by arguing for what’s right, and by trying to act with compassion” (Gunther, 2001). For the people Gunther interviews, there seems to be a rather strong belief that spirituality actually benefits the company. Gunther himself concludes that the movement may be simply driven by people who strive to find purpose and make meaning in life; he concludes that whether or not this trend will last remains to be seen.

This type of popular dialogue combined with a growing body of research does support the idea that spirituality can impact job satisfaction. It seems not only logical but likely to this student that a person’s disposition would have some affect on other aspects of his or her life. It appears that others agree with this point of view; a new movement is afoot to integrate spirituality into the work experience. This student hopes to contribute to these findings, inspiring new questions and added research. In this study, subjects answer questions based on the aforementioned JAREL Spiritual Well Being Scale (Hungelmann, Kenkel-Rossi, Klassen & Stollenwerk, 1996) and from the Job Descriptive Index (Fields, 2002). The respondents’ answers may provide some insight into whether or not job satisfaction can be influenced by the level of one’s spiritual well-being.
Methodology

This student introduced a self-administered survey to a control group of 20 employees who share the same employer. The subjects perform identical tasks in a medium sized Florida public library. They work the same days of the week at one location. Each respondent was asked to complete an anonymous, confidential 3-part questionnaire and deposit it in a completed survey box on the job site.

The initial section of the survey instrument asks 39 questions from the *Job Descriptive Index* originally developed in 1969 by Smith, Kendall and Hulin (Fields, 2002, p. 23). It uses five different facets to measure job satisfaction: the work itself, pay, promotion, supervision and co-workers. The measure of these 5 items has shown to be positively correlated to commitment to the organization. Respondents were asked to complete this portion of the questionnaire by circling “Y” for yes, “N” for no or “?” for undecided.

The second section of the survey instrument is based on items from the JAREL Spiritual Well-Being Scale created by Hundleman, Kenkel-Rossi, Klassen and Stollenwerk (1996). This section’s questions are designed to measure the strength of one’s perceived spirituality using a 5 point Likert Scale.

The final component of the survey asks individuals about their age, sex, time with the company, and their status as full-time or part-time employees. The entire questionnaire is contained within one sheet of paper, the back and front of a folded, 11 x 17 sheet. This design contains the survey, negating the need for any kind of numbering system to identify the pages of the questionnaires.

At the top of each section, subjects are reminded that their results will remain anonymous and confidential.
Results of Data

The research question to be examined in this paper is the relationship between spirituality and job satisfaction. The results of the survey instrument data indicate the control group has strongly positive responses in regards to both job satisfaction and spirituality.

Job satisfaction measurement results:

Subjects were asked to answer yes, no or neutral to 23 statements describing their job. 82% of survey respondents found their work “fascinating,” 100% answered work was “satisfying,” and 91% found it “challenging.” 73% viewed their work as “important.” When asked if their work was frustrating, 71% answered no. Was work awful? 91% answered no.

Regarding pay, 100% of respondents believed they were not “well” paid, 82% believed they were not “fairly” paid. However, 73% felt they were “adequately” paid.

Questions about opportunity at work revealed that 82% of respondents thought they did not have an “excellent” opportunity to advance, and 73% viewed their opportunity as “limited.” However, respondents were split on whether or not they were in a “dead-end job,” 45% answered yes, 55% answered “no.”

Regarding supervision, 64% found their supervisor “honest,” and 82% thought their supervisor was “intelligent.” When asked if the supervisor was “hard to please” or “confusing,” 100% answered no.

How did these respondents view their coworkers? 55% said their coworkers were “loyal,” 82% said they were “friendly” and “responsible.” When asked if their coworkers were “lazy” or “bothersome,” 91% answered no. When asked if coworkers were “stupid,” 100% said no.

Note: None of the respondents chose undecided for any of the questions in this section.
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**Spiritual well-being measurement results:**

Using a Likert 5-point scale, subjects indicated their level of agreement to 12 statements regarding spirituality. 73% strongly agreed that their life has purpose, 18% agreed, and the remaining 9% were neutral. 64% strongly agreed they believe in the existence of a higher power, 27% agreed; 9% disagreed. When respondents were asked if they thought we were all somehow connected, 36% strongly agreed, 36% agreed, and 27% were neutral. 64% of respondents strongly agreed they believe in the dignity of all people, 36% agreed. And, when asked if they experience wonder in the everyday, 55% strongly agreed, 36% agreed and 9% were neutral.

Regarding spiritual activity, 36% strongly agreed that they engage in some kind of spiritual practice, 36% agreed, and 27% were neutral. 18% strongly agreed that they devote time to reflect on life’s meaning, 64% agreed, 64% were neutral, and 9% disagreed. 27% strongly agreed that they make a difference, 55% agreed and 18% were neutral. 55% strongly agreed that they look for the good in others; 45% agreed. 64% strongly agreed that they live ethically; the remaining 36% agreed. 18% strongly agreed that they find meaning in all they do; 45% agreed and 36% were neutral. 45% strongly agreed that they strive to show kindness; the remaining 55% agreed.

**Additional information and demographics:**

Because different groups answer questions in different ways, the following four details could make this study more useful. 64% of the subjects are part-time employees, working less than 40 hours per week in general; 36% are full-time. 18% of respondents have been with their current employer for less than one year, 45% have been with the organization for one to two years, 27% for three to five years, and 8% for ten years or more. The respondents’ ages vary
widely: 9% are under 20 years old, 9% are 20-29 years old, 9% are 30-39 years old, 9% are 40-49 years old, and 8% are over 50. 91% of respondents are female.

Limitations:

The surveyed respondents may have felt they could be identified based on questions like age, sex and length of time with the organization. Although the subjects were told this survey would remain anonymous and confidential, the researcher who administered the survey also sometimes supervises the subjects. This may have influenced their answers.

In addition, a control group, while helping to eliminate alternate explanations for job satisfaction, has its own constraints. The small, specialized set of respondents does not lend itself well to generalization.

Conclusion

The surveyed subjects indicate a high level of spirituality and a moderately high level of job satisfaction. The results do reflect this student’s expectations; however, the data is not generalizable. And, the results do not suggest whether this study’s two variables have a causal or even correlative relationship. The sample studied was too small; testing a number of varied control samples could provide more conclusive data. This researcher believes that more research could help determine the relationship between spirituality and job satisfaction.
References

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