Workplace spirituality and employee commitment: ‘a critical review of contemporary literature

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Abstract
For a long time, the Western idea of life has kept the outer real world away from the inner world of spirituality. I have always felt that combining two could be damaging. There is a growing realization by the modern management think tanks that workspace spirituality has a definite role in improving performance and productivity while still ensuring employee engagement, motivation, commitment, and fulfilling his individual spiritual needs. Loyal personnel are the greatest treasured means to achieve a feat in the long run for any enterprise. Having committed employees enhances the competitive edge of any organization by lowering the rates of people leaving the organization and quitting their jobs. There has been limited work done to study the interplay of spirituality at the workplace and organizational commitment of employees how one correlates with the other. This work attempts to review the contemporary peer-reviewed literature on the association between workplace spirituality and organizational commitment. In this critical appraisal of contemporary literature, we look at the role of workspace spirituality in improving employee commitment. Our review looked at various measurable dimensions of workspace spirituality and employee commitment, which have been used by recent empirical questionnaire-based studies and their findings.

Keywords
Workplace Spirituality, Employee Commitment, Dimensions, Correlation.

1 Introduction
‘Through work, the human being seeks meaning.’ “Spirituality is inclusive, tolerant, and open-minded,” as studied by Mitroff

On the one hand, the human race has evolved at a pace and has exponentially improved the quality of life. However, on the other, it has burdened most of us to adapt to the change. If we look at our lifetime, from home environment to workplace, everything has seen a sea of change in just the last three decades. The way we live, the way we communicate, the way we learn, the way we earn, and how we think to the way we solve day-to-day problems at work or home have transformed beyond comparison. Fortunately, we have seen an incremental improvement in all these dimensions, and we call it the modern era. Modernization has increased the pace of our life and has demanded flexibility to adapt to these changes. It is believed that if mind, heart, soul, and body are brought together, it can help the organizations attain greater success; however, ”Western philosophy for a long time has kept outer practical world away from the inner world of spirituality and have constantly felt that merging two could be detrimental,” as observed by Payne.

Centuries ago, religion evolved to give a simplistic set of rights and wrongs and values to be followed by the individual of the community they live in his or her best interest. It brought satisfaction and harmony and improved quality of life [1]. Answering their innate queries about their existence and offering solace to their anxious inner being. It was a means to organize social living and offer a conducive environment for harmony and growth in a community. Over the years, as a society, the human mind and experiences grew two kinds of the journey started seeking ever-rapid growth and excellence in the outer material world [2]. The other was inner journey seeking answers to basic existential questions. Work remained a necessity to earn a living from time immemorial; it helped the individual and allowed sustenance of the community. The usual aspiration of a young child and his parents is the ability of the child to grow up and be able to ac-

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quire skills and knowledge, which would provide him an opportunity to secure a job, which provides him enough to ensure comfortable living. The definition of comfortable living has changed over time and today has gone beyond food, clothes, and shelter.

While these materialistic goals motivate most of us to upgrade our abilities and ensure higher pay packages, society has felt a perceptible change in aspirations and needs over the last few decades [3]. There has been a constant endeavor by individuals, employers, and society to provide opportunities to everyone to seek spiritual goals. With rapid modernization and societal changes, work and its environment have become an extremely important factor in living a fulfilling life, as most of our youth spend more than half the awake hours at work [4]. “What happens to employees at work is important for their mental and physical well-being, a desire for deeper relationships and a sense of greater purpose,” according to Hansen and Keltner.

There has been a significant emphasis on providing a work environment that allows synergy and coherence between work, achievements, and inner peace [5]. A sense of being able to satisfy your inner goals and purpose by offering your services to the organization and the community in a manner, which contributes to the material and spiritual growth of one and all. In globalization and the world, as one village concept where people, material, ideas, and innovations travel at the speed of light globally, it is becoming more and more challenging to retain good workers in an organization. An employee seeks individual growth and material compensation and keeps looking for better opportunities in trying to maximize it [6]. However, with this, competition, psychological stress, and job insecurity are the growing needs of the organization, which are ready to lay off employees to meet the organizational goals. In this complex interplay of organizational needs and individuals’ aspirations, comes the role of workplace spirituality and employee commitment [7]. “Employee commitment is not only related to job retention, but is to do with employee behavior with positive effect on partnership and productivity-improving organizational effectiveness, as observed by Datta; Morgan; Chen.

2 Materials and Methods

We used a multistep approach to research workplace spirituality (WS) and employee commitment (EC).

In this step, we aimed to explore and define qualitatively various dimensions of WS and EC. To look at the quantitative tools, which could be used to evaluate WS and EC, and then look at the existence of evidence correlating WS to EC [8]. We planned to review the role of WS as an independent variable and EC as the dependent variable in our literature review.

We took out keywords to research the topic on the internet using the Google search engine and its links to other online literature banks [9]. The keywords we used were workspace spirituality, EC, dimensions of WS, correlation of WS to EC, employee satisfaction, employee dropouts, and productivity.

We stored in our data bank all the theoretical and empirical studies published over the last two decades, which looked at WS as a predictor of EC, including a few, which, in addition, looked at other mediators and moderators and dropped studies [10]. They, in turn, looked at WS and correlated it to other dimensions, like employee performance, emotional intelligence, organizational citizenship behavior of the employee, employee motivation, etc [11].

Critically selecting and deselecting studies. We selected 17 studies published in English literature from all parts of the world over the last two decades. Most of the studies (15) included were empirical, which used a validated survey questionnaire to look at the quantitative correlation of WS with EC. Two other articles used were extensive qualitative reviews on the subject of dimensions of WS and EC, and the same was used to discuss meaningful dimensions of the two variables [12].

To keep our study more objective, we did not use any secondary data like media reports, observations, or expert opinions in our literature review [13].

While carrying out the literature review, we tried to look at the possible areas of further research and knowledge gaps. We tried to synthesize from the studies an evolving theme.

We have descriptively presented our standalone literature review.

3 Results

3.1 Need to study WS and EC

“For a long time, management and spirituality were considered incompatible and have fallen in love with each other in the last decade,” as researched by Benefiel. With a constant endeavor to improve human resource management, there has been an impetus in
recent times by most management teams to look at the concept of WS and to determine its role in improving the quality and quantity of work in an organization [14]. Linked with it is the concept of spirituality and organizational commitment. Although the prime goal of the most organization remains productivity affecting profit margins, it is now a pertinent realization that financial remuneration may have a ceiling effect on EC, performance, and satisfaction. Emphasis needs to be paid on other dimensions of the work environment, which may improve productivity. WS over the last two decades has become the buzzword for much work. It has been done on WS, defining its dimension and studying its role and its interplay with other organizational issues [15].

Similarly, there has been good quality work done in organizational commitment, from defining it to studying its role in organizational benefits. However, there has been limited work done to study the interplay of spirituality at the workplace and employee commitment to how one correlates with the other. This work endeavors to review the contemporary peer-reviewed literature on the relationship between WS and organizational commitment.

3.2 Defining workplace spirituality

The term spirituality is difficult to define, and the moment you try and define it, you lose its essence. It is imprecise; it is a phenomenon with guiding definitions and not a sacrosanct method of working with clear rules and definitions. Before we can think of correlating organizational or WS to the employee’s commitment, we need to have definitions, dimensions, and aspects, which could be measured tangibly. An oversimplified definition given by Ashmos and Duchon is “the recognition that employees have an inner life that nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work that takes place in a community.”

Another definition of WS is “a framework of organizational values evidenced in the culture that promotes employee’s experience of transcendence through the work process, facilitating their sense of being connected to others in a way that provides feelings of competence and joy,” in an evaluator study by Giacalone and Jurkiewicz. The difficulty arises when we try and define the paradigm of WS.

“WS can be described as a search of meaning, having faith or belief that there is fabulous power outside humans that can benefit their lives and become the way of life,” as researched by Sintaasih et al. They brought out that WS may indirectly connect with an employee’s work engagement and which may be through EC.

“When employees possess a deep sense of meaning and purpose in their work, sense of community and connectedness with others, and being in alignment with their values and organization values, they are bound to become more satisfied, more creative, and being more committed to the organization and ultimately influence individual’s well-being, and organizational performance,” as studied by Djafri & Noordin.

“A foundation of organizational value, which is represented as promoting employee experience of transcendence through the work process, facilitation of their sense of being connected to others in a way that provides feelings of completeness and joy,” as in an evaluator study by Long & Mills.

Sukumaran and colleagues proposed three views of WS. The first is our inner consciousness, which is not programmed like our societal beliefs and values; the second is religious views. These are views and beliefs many times supernatural and beyond comprehension, but rigid and nonconforming; last is the existentialist views. Why am I working, what should be my objective, where does it lead to, as recorded by Sukumarurup and Christopher.

“WS is being conceived as a desire to find ultimate purpose in life, and the search for meaning in life is a part of one’s journey towards spiritual awareness,” according to Cavanagh; Franklin Klerk. There have been sincere efforts in this direction. The most often used and described definition has been offered by Milliman and his colleagues. They have empirically defined three distinct dimensions of spirituality at the workplace as meaningful work (individual level, having a sense of solidarity (at group level), alignment with an organizational mission (organizational level). “Meaningful work entails enjoying what one does, derives energy from work, and can feel a sense of meaning and purpose out of what he does. Solidarity is a feeling of being connected with colleagues, enjoys the support of each other, and has a sense of common purpose. Alignment with organizational values and mission is being linked to organizational goals, values, and also relates to organizations’ consideration towards the employee,” as stated by Milliman, Czaplewski, and Ferguson. There have been various authors trying to define WS based on their interpretations. On extensive literature, “meaningful work, a sense of purpose
and connectedness” are the main components of most definitions. Milliman concluded, “That meaningful work dimension explains affective commitment, job satisfaction, job engagement, and self-esteem.”

### 3.3 Defining employee commitment

The commitment of an employee to an organization depends on many aspects. However, mainly it comes with the attachment and bond of the employee with the organization, the contribution in day-to-day work and taking higher responsibilities too, which depend largely on how devoted an employee feels and committed to the goals specified by the organization.

“Commitment is a psychological state of employee’s relationship with the organization, which prevents him from leaving,” as observed by Allen Meyer. Organizational commitment is described as “employee loyalty to the organization, which is manifested into (1) powerful willingness to be a member of the organization (2) willingness to work hard, as desired by the organization, (3) a particular belief or faith and acceptance of organizational value and purpose,” as researched by Sintaasih et al.

“Organizational commitment incriminates affective commitment (emotional attachment, identification and the involvement of an individual in the organization), continuance commitment, and normative commitment,” as in an evaluator study by Sintaasih et al. & Rahman et al. As per Rahman and colleagues, employee commitment is of three types: affective, continuance, and normative commitment. As Taltlah has described it as “a positive clash that an employee has with the organization and its goals,” Newmann has described emotional commitment to increase, as the organization takes care of the employee’s expectations and needs. The normative commitment was described by Marsh and Mannari as an obligatory responsibility an employee feels towards the organization, which has provided him the job and its benefits. Holcomb described continuance of commitment as the cost-benefit analysis, which an employee evaluates when he thinks of leaving a job and decides against it due to monetary, social, seniority, and other benefits, which he is likely to lose.

### 3.4 Critical appraisal of current literature evidence

#### 3.4.1 International studies

Rego & colleagues studied the responses of 361 employees across 154 organizations. They found that meaning at work, sense of community, and value alignment improves effective commitment. WS results in a
more satisfied and happier employee, whose quality of family and social life improves and indirectly leads to improved commitment. Effective and normative commitments are strongly linked to spiritual dimensions. The commitment may be more linked to spirituality than organization performance. Spirituality in the organization improves commitment to the organization, offers them a sense of psychological safety, and drives in the sense of purpose, self-determination, enjoyment, and belonging. As pointed out, a well-managed organization delivers work output and performance, which delivers material gains and allows the organization to improve its work culture by focusing on aspects, like spiritual richness, which further improves efficiency and commitment. Rego says ‘Without including spirituality in the work culture, individuals keep using their hands and brains but fail to involve their soul, which hampers creativity and full potential and impairs employee satisfaction.’ They brought out that quality of work cannot improve if the employee has an instrumental continuance as the driving force. It promotes absenteeism, hampers responsible behavior, and thus compromises performance. The limitation of their empirical survey-based study was that the dependent variable is EC. The independent variable is workspace spirituality; data were collected simultaneously from the same subjects. They suggested for next studies to either use different subjects or use a longitudinal model for data collection to improve the quality of the study.

Various models were extensively studied by Morteza and colleagues of WS, including EC, performance, and productivity. They found “the result of the study revealed that spiritual value at work is one of the most important factors that create employees’ organizational commitments and the relationship between them are significantly positive.”

A cross-sectional study was carried out by Lawrence and colleagues, using both descriptive and correlation design to study organizational commitment amongst the academic staff in Kenya public and private universities. They showed a significant positive correlation between organizational commitment and WS. They also discussed the concept of “Perceived Organizational Support (POS).” According to their findings, “perceived organizational support has a substantially constructive effect on employee organizational commitment,” according to Colakoglu and Culha

The research was carried out by Zakaria and colleagues in the Khash City of Iran amongst agricultural workers (67 respondents) and found a significant and positive relationship between WS and EC. They used a Milliman-designed questionnaire for WS and Myer Allen's pro forma for EC. Each dimension that is meaningful at work, solidity among colleagues, and alignment with organization values strongly correlated with spirituality at work.

In their questionnaire, Mohamed Mousa and colleagues based correlational study done amongst 200 Egyptian primary public-school teachers (75% responded), who demonstrated a low level of organizational commitment.

The case study done by Salajegheh and colleagues among Iranian national oil distribution company employees was a questionnaire survey using spirituality questionnaire from the inventory of Memarzade Tehran and Sanei and for EC Allen and Meyers’ questionnaire, found a strong correlation between the two. In addition, they also found that commitment was more in females, employees more than 50 years of age, and those who were not diploma holders (lower education level). They concluded that each dimension of workspace spirituality, individual, group, and organization should be carefully and periodically monitored as a part of human resource management to ensure a high EC level.

In their case study published by Mehran, as a member of the department of human resource in the municipality of Tehran, Iran, of 166 employees out of 472 workers of the corporation and found a strong correlation between WS and EC, they also found it to have a strong relation to organizational citizenship behavior. Three hundred and thirty-one public health care workers were studied by Joseph and colleagues in five government setups of Nigeria to examine WS and employee affective commitment. They discovered a substantial association between organizational values and employee affective commitment. In contrast, organizational culture has a considerable but weak association between WS and employee affective commitment.

An Indonesian study by Agung & Colleagues looked at the relationship between three entities that is WS, EC, and work engagement, amongst 243 banking sector employees. They carried out a statistically strong analysis and Confirmatory Factor Analysis. They found a significant positive relationship between all three: work engagement, spirituality, and commitment, direct and indirect. The impact of WS on
organizational commitment was observed by Amen and colleagues from Karachi, Pakistan, and also observed mediating effect of job satisfaction between the two; amongst 1655 university faculties. They found a strong positive effect of workspace spirituality on EC, but no mediator effect of job satisfaction between WS and EC.

3.4.2. Indian studies

From an academic institute from Lucknow, Narang, and colleagues, India reviewed the antecedents of EC. Employee engagement, commitment, motivation, and spirituality are important constructs for the growth of organizations. They found that employee engagement, commitment, motivation, and spirituality were closely linked with each other. The commitment of employees towards the organization was important for growth and competitive advantage. Commitment is an ongoing process of knowledge, improvement, measurement, and action. Committed employees have higher engagement, efficiency, growth, and productivity and lower retention. Conversely, lower commitment, waste of effort, increased absenteeism, less productivity, and reduced profit margins for the organization.

In Gwalior, Pathak and colleagues carried out a questionnaire survey amongst 200 faculties of the professional courses. They found a strong correlation and impact of workspace spirituality on EC. Data were collected by Jena and colleagues from 761 Indian manufacturing and service sector employees. They looked at the relation between workspace spirituality and EC. However, they also looked at whether organizational citizenship behavior played a significant role as an intermediary between the two variables and if emotional intelligence had a moderating effect. They found workspace spirituality a sound and consistent predictor of EC. However, they also saw an insignificant effect of organizational citizenship behavior and emotional intelligence on EC.

4 Discussion and conclusion

Most of the literature on workspace spirituality comes from the west. Although human attitudes and behaviors are universal, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds significantly impact individual and societal needs. With the rapid globalization of the workplace and culture, there is a hard felt need to expand the empirical and theoretical research in this subject to the eastern world and gain from these experiences to obtain a global outlook, benefitting everyone. The meaning of spirituality and its role in society may hold a whole new perspective when researched in developing countries like ours with a different socio-economic structure. Hence, the need of the hour to study its role in different regions of the world to understand it better and use it effectively for everyone’s goodness.

In our review of recent literature on the subject, we found that WS’s theoretical background and dimensions are well researched. It is no longer felt to be an intangible science. It has been felt as a need by many of the human resource organizations looking at improving the quality and quantity of work in their organizations and catering to employee needs and satisfaction, thus decreasing loss of person-hours and dropouts. The dimensions of the WS have been made quantifiable by the development of questionnaires, the most popular of which is the one given by Milliman and colleagues based on work by Ashmos and Duchon. The same is a tool, which we recommend should be used in future research. Garg and colleagues recently published a recent interesting work that has used an Indian construct for WS, although not adequately validated but is a good pilot study. Its use can be contemplated by showing its reproducibility and sensitivity in quantifying the known dimensions of WS vis-à-vis the questionnaire proposed by Milliman and colleagues. As language may not be a barrier to understanding the questionnaire in the subject population, which usually would include middle-level organizational employees, it may not be translated. However, in countries where English is a less used language, there might be a need for translation into the local language. Then it may need to be validated separately.

When we look at EC, the three-pillar model proposed by Meyer draws our attention, as it is the most popular tool used to evaluate and quantify EC. The same has been extensively used and should become a part of the standard questionnaire to study EC. The questionnaire seems easy to use; however, language translation may be required depending upon the prevalence of English as a local language.

Most studies show a strong positive correlation between WS and EC. WS had the strongest positive effect on affective and normative commitment and little on continuance commitment. All three dimensions of spirituality showed a strong positive correlation with EC in western literature. However, only meaning at work and solidarity with colleagues and community had a strong positive effect on EC in Middle Eastern
and Indian studies and value alignment with organization, which had minimal effect on EC. In few studies, organizational citizenship behavior, which evaluates the employees’ role and out-of-role work, showed a role as a mediator, and emotional intelligence came out as a moderator. However, we need separate studies to look at the role of these dimensions in improving EC.

In conclusion, based on our review of the theoretical and empirical literature on WS and organizational commitment, there seems to be a strong positive effect of WS on EC. Hence, under the prevailing work environment, where absenteeism, reduced productivity, lack of engagement, and dropout remains a concern, we need to conduct more studies to define the effect of various organizational factors on EC.

However, the notion of lack of commitment found in today’s organizations catalyzes to conduct further study on organizational commitment.

Conflict of interest
None declared.

Author contributions
The authors read the ICMJE criteria for authorship and approved the final manuscript.

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