Is spirituality at work a pragmatic way to cope with stress and prevent turnover? A bibliometric analysis and conceptual framework

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Abstract The modern workplace fumbles to perform progressively as there is a surge in work stress (WS) and turnover intention (TI) among employees. Unlike many prevailing stress coping techniques like therapies, employee wellness programmes, meditation, etc., workplace spirituality (WPS) could be a pragmatic strategy. Firms can indoctrinate WPS in the workplace to deal with work stress and prevent burnout, exhaustion, and turnover. The motto of the study is to provide collective evidence from the existing literature on the dimensions of WPS and find how it can be indoctrinated into management practices to cope with work stress and employee turnover. The authors established a conceptual relationship, probing how workplace spirituality dimensions could be aligned with work stress and turnover intention. Bibliometrics divulge that many countries are presently working on WPS and its significance for organisational performance.

Keywords: workplace spirituality, work stress, intention to quit, occupational stress, RStudio

1. Introduction

Workplace spirituality comprises three components: the inner life, meaningful work, and a sense of community (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000) (Milliman et al., 2003) is a new and promising phenomenon that has gained the attention of organizational researchers (Dal et al., 2020). Does WPS lead to a stress-free and productive work environment? In search of an answer to the above question, the authors gathered the literature. As a prerequisite, it is necessary to understand the current scenarios. The modern workplace is dynamic, and it changes from time to time. Particularly, changes are instantaneous and rapid post-pandemic. Remote working has become the new normal in IT firms and other service sectors to achieve work-life balance. However, production sectors couldn’t escape to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has seen billions of people struggling with anxiety and stress around the globe (Weblog et al., 2022). Johnny C. Taylor, Jr. says that employees feeling isolated and finding it difficult to remain in front of leadership may have long-term effects on their career (Ask HR : How Can I Manage Stress in the Workplace ?, 2022). In modern scenarios, retaining potential employees has been challenging for the managers, as employees were finding various new opportunities on the one hand and, on the other, losing interest in the current firm due to increased work stress. Even remote-working employees faced a problem in their work-life balance as they suffered from increased work-life and life-work conflicts (Palumbo, 2020). Thus, retaining employees becomes difficult when they face job-related stress. In other words, “employee retention starts with easing the stress and strain of the employees” said Orvitz, K. (2022). It is observed that people work with not only their hands but also their hearts (spirits) (Petchsawang & Duchon, n.d.). Therefore, sustaining workplace spirituality can significantly reduce employees workplace deviant behavior (Sciences, 2019). When employees work with their hearts (spirits), they attain meaning and purpose in their work, which reflects fulfilment in their life as well (Petchsawang & Duchon, n.d.) (Milliman et al., 2003). Thus, workplace spirituality could be a potential moderator that might affect the outcomes of work stress of employees and reduce the intention to quit. And moreover, there is a need to assess positive organizational behaviour aspects like organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) to replace negative aspects like stress and burnout (Riasudeen & Singh, 2020) in the workplace.

Literature has neither given a specific definition nor theory regarding workplace spirituality, intention to quit, or work stress. The timeline has shown various technical definitions of the above aspects and attributes that have been modified from time to time to serve the scenario that the author wants to explain. For instance, stress is defined across the timeline as follows: Caplan, Cobb, French, Van Harrison, and Pinneau (1975) stated that work stress is a “characteristic of the job environment that causes threat to an individual.” (Caplan et al., 1975). Marshal and cooper (1976) stated that “occupational stress is the negative environmental factors or stressors like work overload, disruptive workplace, role ambiguity, etc. that are associated with a particular job.” (Cooper & Marshall, 1976), (Meri & Kamana, n.d.). Beehr and Newman (1978) defined job stress as “a condition wherein job-related factors interact with the worker to change (disrupt or enhance) his or her
psychological or physiological condition such that the person’s mind and/or body are forced to deviate from normal functioning.” (BEEHR & NEWMAN, 1978). Likewise, Turnover intentions, or Intention to Quit (ITQ), have been conceptually defined by several writers across the timeline, and few are as clear as here. Wall Rahman and Zekriya Nas (2013) recently stated that “turnover is an employees’ permanent movement beyond the boundaries of the organization” (Chu, 2014). According to Weisberg and Carmeli (2006), the turnover intentions of an employee has three components: 1. thoughts of quitting the current job; 2. intention to seek another job; and 3. finally quitting the current job (15; Chu, 2014). Likewise, workplace spirituality has gained prominence in recent decades, and the definitions of conceptualizing workplace spirituality are broad. According to Ashmos and Duchon (2000), workplace spirituality is defined as “the recognition that employees have an inner life that nourishes and nourished by meaningful work that takes place in the context of community” (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). Later in (2003), Giacalone and Jurkiewicz defined workplace spirituality as “a framework of organizational values evidenced in the culture that promotes employees’ experience of transcendence through the work process, facilitating their sense of being connected to others in a way that provides feelings of joy and completeness.” (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003). With the above literature, a conceptual framework has been projected.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Workplace Spirituality

The topic of spirituality in work has gained attention from the popular press, but it is barely seen in organizational science and hardly welcomed in reality (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000), and it is undeniable (Klerk, 2005) (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2008). In this scenario, CEOs must realize that focusing on individual corporations will be crucial for now and the future, and it is also time to establish themselves as worthy firms, i.e., organizations with a higher sense of purpose (Publishing, 2011). In recent decades, research studies have shown a surge in the topic of workplace spirituality, but the practical implications for organizations seem to be less evident. In the literature, workplace spirituality is defined as follows: “the recognition that employees have an inner life that nourishes and nourished by meaningful work that takes place in the context of community” (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). “a framework of organizational values evidenced in the culture that promotes employees’ experience of transcendence through the work process, facilitating their sense of being connected to others in a way that provides feelings of joy and completeness.” (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003). Many believe that spirituality is a synonym for religious beliefs and that most people associate workplace spirituality with practicing religious beliefs in the workplace. Though many people express their religious beliefs at work, it has to be emphasized that spirituality at work is not about religion (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). When workplace spirituality is connected to religion, it is ill-defined and untestable, and thus it cannot contribute to scientific knowledge (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2020). Since the topic ‘workplace spirituality’ gained attention among researcher, many dimensions have been brought up according to the modern workplace (Pandey et al., 2009). The widely adopted dimensions proposed by Ashmos and Duchon have been followed in the model. Workplace spirituality comprises three dimensions: the inner life, meaningful work, alignment of organization values, and a sense of community (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). And in particular, it should be considered that meaningful work is most important as it gives meaning to life (Klerk, 2005). Johnny C. Taylor, Jr. says that humans are not meant to operate in isolation, connecting with others is the path for survival (Ask HR : How Can I Manage Stress in the Workplace ?, 2022). The origin of empirical work on workplace spirituality was in the 1990s (Saxena, 2020). Literature shows that workplace spirituality is an inevitable phenomenon in the workplace as it can affect various employee attitudes (Milliman et al., 2003). In general well-being, spirituality can influence an individual in two possible ways: first, it can improve the confidence, self-esteem, commitment, and performance of any individual; and second, it can tap into the individual’s anxiety, stress, and burnout intentions (Karacas, 2010)(Saxena, 2020). Lack of social support and a sense of community in the organization can potentially create negative outcomes such as burnouts and reduced job satisfaction (Ilbery, 1998). Empirical evidence shows that workplace spirituality dimensions have a significant relationship with employee work attitudes like job satisfaction (Sciences, 2019), job involvement, organizational commitment, and individual spirituality is something that can moderate the above relationship (Pawar, 2009). Organizations that inculcate spirituality will yield positive organizational performance as it facilitates the mindfulness and wellbeing of the workforce (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003; Hoffman, 2010). Another piece of empirical evidence suggests strategizing to increase workplace spirituality among nurses to make them treat their patience well in the form of occupational ethics (Norouzi et al., 2018). Henceforth, employee development programs must include creating awareness about workplace spirituality and building core values, pivoting spirituality will promote healthier employee outcomes (Riasudeen & Singh, 2020), and those outcomes reflect higher positive affectivity, resilience, self-efficacy, work engagement (Dal et al., 2020), and employees’ engagement and mental health (Sharma & Kumra, 2020); on the other hand, low-intense workplace spirituality profiles will associate higher negative outcomes in the workplace (Dal et al., 2020). Now we know that workplace spirituality can have an impact on employee attitudes, but there is also a vice versa effect, and studies have been reviewed to understand the effect of an individual’s personality traits on workplace spirituality. An individual who is an extrovert and conscientious will have higher degree of workplace spirituality (Tutar & Oruç, 2020). Apart from managing the task force in the workplace, workplace spirituality also benefits firms by acquiring corporate
sustainability, as workplace spirituality (WPS) and organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) both reinforce workplace behaviour in a positive orientation (Hafeez et al., 2022). Workplace spirituality and its need in the current workplace scenario are well explained using the Alexander Krolof Model, which indicates attributes like thinking positively, learning, self-opening, participation, meaningful work, and interests in work could potentially drive employees to remain happy at the workplace (Dhamija, 2021).

2.2. Work Stress

Stress is an important phenomenon as it displays psychological, physiological, and behavioural symptoms (Meri & Kamana, n.d.) Thus, work stress could potentially influence the workplace behaviour of the employees. Conner says in the employee benefit news that “work stress is more normalized than ever before” (Employee et al., 2022). According to the challenge-stress hindrance model, stress refers to the extent to which individuals respond to emotional or physical stimuli from their environment. Work stress is developed among employees as a direct response to external workplace stressors such as work requirements, practice requirements, and performance appraisals (Jiandong et al., 2022). In other terms, work stress is an outcome of combining demands and controls over the job situation (Malik et al., n.d.). According to the American Psychological Association (APA), more than fifty percent of reported work stress is due to lack of motivation, energy, or effort at work. Work stress is a factor that puts the employees’ well-being at risk (Malik et al., n.d.). The World Health Organization found that more than 700,000 people died from cardiac diseases and strokes associated with work stress. It is observed that not all stress is negatively associated, wherein neural stem cells division has the tendency to pick up and divide stress as positive stress and negative stress, with corresponding outcomes displayed (Pfaff & Volkow, 2016). In recent decades, job stress has attracted many researchers and been reflected in occupational health, workplace behaviour, and many psychological studies (Johnson & Rohde, 2022). Today’s workplace can be very stressful (Bergen et al., 2002), and it can victimize the employees if there are no countermeasures or coping strategies. Literature says a certain amount of stress is essential to accomplishing tasks in the workplace, but not all the stress is that good, and many affect mental well-being of individual (Johnson & Rohde, 2022). As the challenge-stress hindrance model describes, challenge stress in employees can positively control attitude such as job responsibility and time pressure, which can help the employees accomplish their tasks, whereas hindrance stress in employees will have negative control and leads to job overload, conflicts, and workplace hindrances (Jiandong et al., 2022). Literature supports the idea that job stress and emotional exhaustion are predictors of various negative outcomes in employee behaviour (Karatepe & Nkendong, 2014). Another plane of work stress in work fatigue, which refers to inability to work due to physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion (Jiandong et al., 2022). Irrespective of age group, work stress exists, but yes, the impact of work stress is quite higher among older working adults in the labour market (Malik et al., n.d.). A recent clinical study reveals that work stress assessed using the effort-reward imbalance (ERI) ratio would increase the risk of poor periodontal status (Sato et al., 2022). Another recent study reveals that teaching innovation could be higher through promoting temporal leadership but at lower work stress levels (Li & Id, 2022), which indicates that work stress can have an impact on process innovation, particularly in teaching innovation. In the medical field, role stressors for nurses said to be the most important reason behind job dissatisfaction (Iyer & Deshmukh, 2018). Through an empirical study, Renzo Bianchi et.al., suggested that it is incumbent to identify factors in the workplace that causes stress and depression in workers and take remedial actions (Performance & Characteristics, 2022). Conner says that since work stress has become more normal nowadays, firms should make policies to protect their employees’ mental health (Employee et al., 2022). Another big factor to be noticed is that the depression caused by work stress is evident. Depressions are the biggest influential factor that causes presenteeism among employees (Burton et al., 2004), and the fact is that presenteeism is one of the biggest barriers of employee and organizational performance.

2.3. Turnover Intention

Turnover intention, or intention to quit, is a decisive call of an employee plans to leave a position in the organization or the organization itself (Karatepe & Nkendong, 2014), and employee turnover could significantly affect organization performance (Rifin, 2022). Though intention to leave or quit is different from actual turnover, researchers found an immediate effect of intention to quit on turnover (Chu, 2014). Turnover intentions can easily be contagious in the workplace and drive the employees turnover behaviour (Oh & Chhinzer, 2021). As these intentions are contagious and have already attracted the attention of employers and researchers, companies have started inculcating family-friendly practices (FFP) culture in the workplace to retain their employees (Journal et al., 2022). Disruptive workplace can potentially reduce morale among employees and promotes high turnovers (Publishing, 2011). Disruptive workplace could positively associate with adverse employee mindsets, which could lead to exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion is a validated predictor that drives employees to display burnout and turnover intentions (Karatepe & Nkendong, 2014). The right person in the wrong place or vice versa in another factor that drives employees to quit. It is observed that people with common interest, values, and friends will stay, and people who do not fit the firm tends to leave (Mobley, 2014); i.e., diversity climate as an employees’ perception (Lee et al., 2021) or perceived organizational support (Bindu, 2021) can significantly reduce turnover intentions.

https://www.malque.pub/ojs/index.php/mr
Reduced work life balance (Bindu, 2021; Atta et al., 2022); work-family conflict (Harun et al., 2022); weak employees’ engagement (Bindu, 2021; Choo, 2021); and diminished job satisfaction (Choo, 2021) are other aspects that potentially influences and reduce employees’ turnover intentions. Despotic leadership plays a crucial role in employee’s ITQ. The work environment turns toxic, and cognitive dissonance occurs eventually with despotic leaders, and this drives employees to quit (Iqbal et al., 2022). The performance ratings of the supervisor are another potential element that can contribute to the aspect; a meta-analysis study found that negative supervisor ratings highly associated with employees intention to quit (Zimmerman & Darnold, 2007); however, servant leadership (Johnson & Rohde, 2022) and transformational leadership are negatively associated with turnover intentions (Oh & Chhinzer, 2021); for instance, a survey says that supportive supervisor reduce the perception of ITQ among subordinates (Kaur & Randhawa, 2021). Another survey’s research reveals that distributive justice can influence the employee’s perception of corporate governance and drive the employee to quit (Zaitouni, 2020); i.e., experiencing injustice will make an employee quit the organization (Siwela, 2018). Social support can also influences the work environment, which makes employees decide on quitting. Supportive co-workers have reduced the intention to quit among female bankers working in a private commercial bank (Chowdhury et al., 2022). Considering academicians; organizational culture have an indirect effect on academic staff’s intention to quit (Trung et al., 2021). Studies on full-time school teachers reveal that workplace bullying (Yadav et al., n.d.), extrinsic motivation (Akosile & Ekemen, 2022), and reduced or no rewards (Setyanto, 2021; Negesse et al., 2022; Schug et al., 2022) are other factors that leads to quitting. Another study on academicians in higher educations institutions reveals that when there is good space for work-life balance, there is less room for turnover intentions (Kakar et al., 2021). Unhealthy environments even push PhD scholars to quit their positions and leave academia (Id et al., 2022). However, not only the extrinsic factors are responsible for turnover intentions; literature displays that intrinsic factors such as resistance to change (Sriva, 2020), job (role) ambiguity (Harun et al., 2022), job satisfaction (Iwu et al., 2021; Setyanto, 2021; Zimmerman & Darnold, 2007; Negesse et al., 2022), affective commitment of employees (Siwela, 2018), interpersonal strain (Simone et al., 2021), intrinsic motivation (Setyanto, 2021; Akosile & Ekemen, 2022), and self-performance ratings also controls the employees’ turnover intentions (Zimmerman & Darnold, 2007).

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Data Collection for bibliometric analysis

The Web of science is a platform that includes a huge core database of articles that are categorized into 4 major categories: 1. science citation index expanded; 2. social science citation index; 3. index chemicus; and 4. emerging citation index. Keywords are chosen to access the database and get articles from 1985 to 2022 on all keywords (Figure 1).

![Figure 1 Data Collection for bibliometric analysis (Data Collection).](source: Prisma scientific data mining technique.)
3.2. Conceptual Framework

The theory behind the concept of indoctrinating the dimensions of workplace spirituality in the workplace can reduce the severity of workplace stress, which can eventually shrink the intention to quit among employees. The Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which is also a motivation theory, states that all employees at work have three key psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The absence of the same can create internal pressures among employees, and the chances of quitting the organization or working more efficiently are based on the individual employee’s choice.

Figure 2: Moderation of Workplace Spirituality dimensions on the relationship between Work Stress and Turnover Intention.

Figure 3: Mediation of Employee Burnout between Work Stress and Turnover Intention, and also moderation of the relationship with Workplace Spirituality.

3.3. Scales

With respect to the chosen variables, say workplace spirituality, work stress and turnover intentions, literature displays various scales for certain variables and very few standard scales for certain variables. In such case, validated and cited scales have been chosen for work stress. The scale chosen here is applicable to most domain work stress scenarios as the scales differ from domain to domain, and it is one of the recently validated scale found with a large number of citation in a shorter time span. “The Work Stress Questionnaire (WSQ)” Kristina Holmgren formulated the scale in 2009, validated it with female workers, validated it again with male workers, and published it in 2019 (gained 37 citations in the years 2020-2022). WSQ (Frantz & Holmgren, 2019) consist of four constructs of work stress: 1. indistinct organization and conflicts; 2. individual demands and commitment; 3. influence at work; and 4. Work-to-leisure time interference. The four major themes have 21 scalable items (Holmgren et al., 2009) that can be used to identify and measure stress at work. The “Turnover
Intention Scale (TIS-6) has been chosen to measure the turnover intention of the employees. The scale was adopted from the work of Bothma and Roodt (Bothma & Roodt, 2013) (682 citations) that has revised 6 items to measure the TI, and it was revised from the original work “Turnover Intentions” (TIS-15) by Roodt (214 citations). Unlike the above two variables, workplace spirituality has had strong support on its dimensions since 2000 by Ashmos and Duchon which have been validated, reliability checked, and turned into three main scalable dimensions by Milliman et al. in 2003. The scalable dimensions are: 1. Meaningful Work, 2. Sense of Community; and 3. Alignment of Organizational values (Milliman et al., 2003).

4. Results & Discussion

The Co-occurrence network of turnover intention is strongly associated with burnout and stress, wherein the turnover intention of an employee is also determined by other internal factors such as job satisfaction, work commitment, organization commitment, and performance of the employee, yet all the internal factors are potentially driven by stress and burnout. The co-citation network of work stress is found to be strongly associated with health issues of the employee (coronary heart diseases in particular) (Figure 4 and 5).

Figure 4 Co-occurrence network.
Source: VOSviewer visualization.

Figure 5 Co-occurrence network.
Source: VOSviewer visualization.
A factor conceptual map using multiple correspondence analysis on workplace spirituality displays the control over stress and turnover intentions of employees.

4.1. Conceptual Structure Map: MCA method

While running the bibliometric test on chosen 472 articles from the Web of Science with the keywords ‘workplace spirituality’, the conceptual framework reflects the chosen variables (turnover intention and work stress). It is observed that workplace spirituality can influence the workplace stress of an employee and also it can regulate the turnover intention through self-determination theory. Further observations are that workplace spirituality directly related to various other factors and forms the second connection cluster with job satisfaction, employee engagement, mindfulness, and organizational commitment as the outcomes, and further influences employee health, performance, quality, perceptions, attitudes, and values, as the literature says. It is also observed that vast studies with respect to workplace spirituality are conducted with medical professionals (particularly nurses). Therefore, there is scope for the studies can be conducted in non-medical fields that certainly experience work stress (Figure 6).

5. Final Considerations

An increase in work stress drives employees to quit the organization or profession; could workplace spirituality make the workplace environment better and promotes harmony among employees? Could workplace spirituality be a pragmatic way to cope with work stress and reduce employee turnover intentions? Authors have identified the description through literature and running bibliometric analysis. However, an empirical evidence is required to answer the above questions in binary. From this study, the authors observed that the scope for conducting empirical research on how workplace spirituality could significantly influence work stress and intention to quit among employees is high. The study also developed conceptual framework like the influence of work stress on employee turnover intentions and moderation of workplace spirituality. Furthermore, the authors conceptualized the bridge between employers and employees through indoctrinating workplace spirituality and reducing work stress and turnover.
6. Limitations and Future Directions

The study aims to display the possible gap identified in the literature and propose conceptual frameworks for future empirical research. This is a conceptual paper with bibliometric analysis that needs strong empirical evidences. The paper runs through recent published articles to identify the crest and trough of comprehensive view on the connections of the variables, yet a thorough SLR with proper meta-analysis is missing, which could be considered a potential element for a further in-depth study on the connections. In-depth research on workplace spirituality could unveil its importance in handling occupational stress in the workplace, as this paper suggests, and gaining empirical evidences across the globe in various fields will make impressions of workplace spirituality a reality. As already mentioned, workplace spirituality is widely studied with nurses and can be implemented in other fields like teaching professions, the police department, and sales professions who experience work stress. The most applicable essence is workplace spirituality, and as many future studies can be conducted in this fashion to understand how organizations can practice WPS as a pragmatic way to cope with the increasing workplace stress of employees.

Ethical considerations
Not applicable.

Conflict of Interest
The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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