Spiritual intelligence influences and augments employee engagement amidst the crisis

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Abstract Ensuring the safety and engagement of employees has remained a top priority for employers throughout the crisis situation like that of COVID-19 pandemic. Transformational leaders have demonstrated optimism and efficiency in navigating crises, rebuilding confidence, supporting the workforce, and progressing amidst uncertainty. These leaders recognize the diverse needs of internal and external stakeholders, understanding that these needs can vary on a case-by-case basis. Short-term decisions have been made to sustain operations while adhering to physical distancing measures and to provide economic and socioemotional support to employees. Research revealed that employees who were working remotely experienced a heightened sense of well-being, displayed more positive effects, and demonstrated increased engagement. The job crafting theory presents valuable perspectives on how employees can effectively navigate crisis situations by actively reshaping their job roles and empowers them to maintain engagement, resilience, and effectiveness amidst uncertainty and change. Spiritual intelligence (SI) has enabled employees to approach challenges with a focus on meaning and value. It has allowed individuals to perceive the COVID-19 crisis differently and to adapt to their circumstances. SI empowers employees to be creative, draw upon their observations, respond with compassion, and adapt their beliefs. Survey results and correlation analyses have indicated a positive relationship between leaders' efforts to engage employees and the enthusiasm of engaged employees for the organization's future. These findings highlight the influential role of leaders in shaping employee engagement (EE), as well as the connection between EE and employee SI.

Keywords: employee commitment, leadership, job craft, spiritual quotient, COVID

1. Introduction

Organizations worldwide are facing unprecedented challenges amidst the COVID-19 crisis. This global emergency has deeply impacted both society and the workplace. Amidst this crisis, organizations are tasked with achieving high levels of performance, relying heavily on the steadfast commitment and accountability of their employees. To remain competitive and meet work demands, individuals must strive to surpass fiercely competitive benchmarks.

The concept of job crafting theory pertains to the deliberate actions undertaken by employees to actively cultivate, shape, and redefine their professional positions in order to align more effectively with their own talents, preferences, and passions (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). This idea posits that employees are not solely passive recipients of their job assignments, but rather active participants who possess the ability to actively alter the nature of their work in order to enhance meaning, satisfaction, and engagement.

Job crafting typically involves three main dimensions: a) task crafting - altering the tasks and activities involved in one's job, b) interpersonal crafting - altering the nature and quality of communications with peers at workplace, and c) reasoning crafting - reinterpreting the meaning and significance of one's job. By engaging in these forms of crafting, employees can enhance their sense of autonomy, mastery, and purpose in their work, leading to greater levels of engagement and fulfillment.

Spiritual intelligence (SI), as defined by Emmons (2000), involves the adaptive usage of spiritual insights to resolve difficulties and achieve goals in everyday life. The term "spirit" originates from Latin words meaning "to inhale" and "the breath of life," symbolizing the energy or power that animates life. Employees exhibit a remarkable level of commitment, responsibility, and energy when they find a intellect of determination as well as connotation in their lives also in their work. This is where the concept of the Spiritual Quotient (SQ) becomes significant. Enhancing employees' SI helps them identify and enhance their spiritual intelligence, fostering engagement, interpersonal connections, and overall ease of collaboration, even under pressure and stressful conditions. SI engages individuals in activities that are meaningful in both personal and societal contexts, enabling organizations to effectively engage them and yield positive outcomes.

Leaders play a vital role in set-up the pace, culture within organizations. Leadership, as per Northouse (2004) definition, as the deliberate exertion of influence on a collective of individuals with the aim of achieving a common goal. Organizations provide leaders with comprehensive strategies and tools to develop skills such as trust-building, vision-sharing,
and effective relationship-building with employees. Leaders who possess these talents are perceived in a more favourable light by their subordinates.

The crisis situation of COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated significant changes for business leaders, challenging them to chart a viable path forward amidst uncertainty. During this crisis, leaders have gently encouraged employees to perform beyond expectations, fostering heightened engagement. Building trust with employees is essential for effective leadership, and leaders have demonstrated empathy, resilience, compassion, dedication, and accommodation in understanding their workforce’s emotional state. Overall, trust in leaders is a critical component of employee engagement.

Different leadership theories, such as transactional, leader-member exchange, and transformational styles, characterize the attributes, qualities, and styles of leaders. Transformational leaders inspire and empower employees, focusing on higher-order needs and behaviors such as empathy and visionary thinking, which enhance employee engagement.

The concept of an "engaged employee," defined as one who is fully immersed in their job and who actively contributes to the organization’s growth and sustainability, has gained prominence. Employee engagement, initially proposed by Kahn (1990), a complex concept, that is often linked to constructs such as confidence and job satisfaction. Human resources departments in multinational corporations and organizations widely implement employee engagement practices. The most significant challenges facing organizations today include employee retention and engagement. Organizations are actively seeking individuals who demonstrate a consistent willingness to work diligently and are deeply engaged, committed, and passionate about their work.

Researchers have explored the association amongst spiritual intelligence and employee engagement, and have suggested that leaders can also enhance employee engagement, characterized by a positive, fulfilling, work-related attitude. It is through the efforts and enthusiasm of employees that employers can achieve excellence and prosperity.

2. Literature review

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the beginning of the novel COVID-19 illness a crisis, a contagion, resulting in the depletion of Rs.11.4 trillion in investor wealth. The economy of India, which is already experiencing a slowdown, faced further challenges as Moody’s growth forecast decreased to 5.3% in 2020, marking the slowest growth in 11 years (Business World, 2020). Emergence of COVID-19 resulted in a complete halt of social and economic activity, leading economists to highlight the necessity of implementing financial measures to mitigate the unparalleled harm inflicted on the economy, particularly during periods of lockdown. Chaudhary et al. (2020) suggested that every crisis presents a unique opportunity to re-evaluate approaches aimed at personal, community, and societal development. The global outbreak of COVID-19 has highlighted the critical need for the Indian economy to embrace sustainable development models that prioritise self-sufficiency, inclusive frameworks, and environmental sustainability. According to McKinsey (Emmett et al 2020), the pandemic compelled organisations to implement radical changes in the workplace at an unprecedented speed and scale.

The job crafting theory suggests that employees engage in an active process of shaping and redefining their professional responsibilities in order to more effectively match them with their individual abilities, favourites, and desires (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). This theory becomes particularly significant in crisis situations, where organizational structures and job requirements may rapidly change, and employees need to adapt to new circumstances swiftly. During crises, job crafting enables employees to proactively adjust their roles to meet emerging challenges. They may redefine tasks, alter relationships with colleagues, and reassess the significance of their work to maintain a intellect of control and purpose amidst uncertainty. By engaging in job crafting, employees can mitigate feelings of helplessness and anxiety often associated with crises. Employee engagement, in turn, pertains to the degree to which worker feel emotionally invested in and committed to their work and organization (Saks, 2006). Research has shown that job crafting can significantly influence employee engagement by empowering individuals to align their work with their values, strengths, and interests, thereby fostering a deeper sense of connection and commitment to their job roles and organizational objectives (Tims et al., 2013). SQ refers to the cognitive capacity individuals utilize to address issues related to significance and value. Zohar and Marshall (2000) observed that individuals with high SI exhibit correct behavior and intellectual acuity, while those with low SI tend to display challenging behavior. Workplace spirituality is not a peripheral idea; instead, it embraces human endeavours associated with personal growth, empathy, honesty, reliance, dedication to work, and the welfare of employees. Individuals with high SI tend to experience higher levels of job satisfaction and perform better. Stead and Stead (2014) demonstrated that individuals seek connotation and worth in their actions, driven by existential questions regarding their purpose and significance. Moreover, SI enables individuals to assess and comprehend the significance of different lifestyles or courses of action (King, 1999). Workplace spirituality programs have been shown to have a positive impact on individuals in terms of increased productivity, tranquillity, job gratification, and obligation (Reave, 2005). Torabi and Javadi (2013) investigated the association amongst SI on employee engagement (EE).

Leaders play a significant role in enhancing employee engagement by embodying principles and values linked to commitment, empathy, and long-term organizational goals. Bhatnagar (2007) noted that one of the components enhancing
employee engagement is empathy, a characteristic of transformational leadership. There is a close yet complex relationship between leadership and crises. Today, more than ever, the resilience of organizations is intricately linked to the well-being of their workforce, society, and environment. For many leaders, ensuring employee well-being and mitigating future disruptions are top priorities. Ernst and Young (2020) highlighted that business leaders are implementing remote work beyond the demand of current crisis situation and this is to reduce the commuting as well as to introduce greater flexibility into corporate culture. According to McKinsey (Emmett, 2020), employees who work remotely exhibit more positive outcomes, greater engagement, and a stronger sense of well-being. Leaders need to recognize individual contributions and talents that contribute to achieving shared goals, thereby strengthening the leader-employee relationship (Bass, 1985).

There is a global belief that employee engagement (EE) and organizational success are closely intertwined. Gallup (2004) identified a significant correlation between employee engagement and organizational growth. Roof (2014) observed the association among individual SI and EE. Researchers found that high levels of spiritual intelligence and emotional intelligence are crucial and have has a substantial influence on employee engagement, thus enhancing employee engagement. Leaders in organizations face challenges such as a shortage of skilled workers and high turnover rates (Samuel & Chipunza, 2013). According to Jain (2013), there are numerous factors contributing to employee turnover and disengagement, categorized into controllable and uncontrollable factors. COVID-19 can be considered uncontrollable risk factor for medical emergencies beyond organizational control. Employee engagement leads to employee retention, aligning with concepts of job satisfaction and commitment to the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). To gain a competitive edge, organizations need to leverage skilled and competent employees. Engaged employees are crucial in today's globalized and experienced workforce, enabling organizations to remain competitive. The notion of employee engagement is crucial for comprehending and characterising the relationship between an organisation and its employees, both in terms of quality and quantity.

3. Objectives

During the COVID-19 crisis, employee commitment has emerged as a focal point within every organization, aimed at retaining and engaging employees to avoid the costly expenses associated with voluntary staff turnover. Today, organizations face the challenge of retaining and engaging their skilled and capable employees to gain a competitive advantage. Leaders are implementing measures to safeguard employee well-being and ensure organizational productivity for sustainability. Employees need to be engaged in meaningful and stimulating tasks to maintain focus and avoid unnecessary distractions and crises. Workplace initiatives are of paramount importance in cultivating employee engagement. The main objective of this investigation is to explore the spiritual intelligence (SI) of employees and the impact of leadership during the COVID-19 crisis as factor contributing to employee engagement. This study aims to achieve the following:

- To examine how the spiritual quotient (SQ) affects the level of employee engagement in an organization amidst the repercussions of COVID-19.
- To investigate the correlation between various aspects of employee engagement, such as leadership during the COVID-19 "new normal."

Based on these objectives, the following hypothesis have been formulated:

- H01: There is no correlation between the spiritual intelligence and employee engagement during the crisis.
- H02: There is no role of a leader in influencing employee engagement during the crisis.

4. Research methodology

This investigation is of an experimental in nature and was carried out among a sample of 150 respondents in 2020, specifically focusing on personnel working in the prominent service industries of information technology (IT) and information technology-enabled services (ITES) in Bangalore, India. This study aimed to assess the influence of many factors, including organisational culture, overarching working circumstances, and management policies, on employee engagement during the crisis like that of COVID-19 pandemic. A survey was extended to employees, who were requested to participate. Online questionnaires were sent to them through the utilisation of Google Forms.

The research utilized a self-administered spiritual intelligence (SI) questionnaire to assess the behavioral characteristics of deep-thinking employees, including their inclination to transcend their circumstances, mindfulness of their interrelation with each other as well as with the universe, comprehending the overarching objective of their deeds and maintaining faith in a transcendent realm that ultimately bestows worth onto all other entities.

A competent leader contributes in a vital role in understanding the growth of the company. The leader survey questionnaire was developed to assist employees in evaluating leadership within their organization, which reflects the qualities of an individual to oversee the development and evolution of an organization. Specific skills that enhance leadership efficiency and effectiveness, such as adapting to situations, empowering people, maintaining a progressive outlook, and demonstrating empathy, were included in the leadership questionnaire. The Employee Engagement (EE) questionnaire was
designed to gather data on various aspects, including the nature of work and job autonomy, cooperation with colleagues, supervisor support and career advancement opportunities, and organizational and workplace environment.

5. Results and discussion

The Pearson correlation coefficient test was utilized to find out the impact of changes in one variable as the other variable changed. Of the questionnaires distributed, 150 (N=150) respondents completed surveys, each comprising 20 questions for spiritual intelligence (SI), leadership, and employee engagement (EE), as well as 5 job craft questions. The sample selection was conducted using a convenience sampling method. Among the 150 respondents, 69 (46%) were male and 81 (54%) were female (refer to Table 1). Additionally, 117 (78%) of these respondents were married and 33 (22%) were unmarried (refer to Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender (N=150)</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital status (N=150)</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Job crafting has the potential to bolster employees' resilience during difficult periods. By granting individuals the autonomy to adjust their job responsibilities according to their strengths and interests, job crafting boosts employees' feelings of self-assurance and competence, equipping them to navigate challenging situations more effectively (Tims et al., 2013). People are given the opportunity to tackle stimulating and meaningful tasks, they are more likely to invest themselves, leading to increased motivation and satisfaction in their roles. The average score derived from employees' responses regarding their willingness to participate in stimulating projects beforehand demonstrates a notable level of enthusiasm, with an average score of 3.766 indicating a favourable inclination towards tasks that stimulate their intellect and creativity (refer to Table 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables (N=150)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Job Crafting Questionnaire</td>
<td>3.766</td>
<td>0.0465</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The validity of the questionnaire was evaluated using Cronbach’s alpha coefficient, which is a measure of the internal consistency and reliability of the scale. Some researchers regard a questionnaire with a Cronbach’s alpha above 0.8 as satisfactory and valid, as it indicates that the right questions were asked to gather the necessary information (Goforth, 2015). The Cronbach’s alpha coefficients obtained for spiritual intelligence (SI) were 0.867, for leadership were 0.910, and those for employee engagement were 0.926. This suggests that the questionnaire is reliable and valid for use in this study (refer to Table 4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Cronbach’s alpha</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Intelligence</td>
<td>0.867</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader</td>
<td>0.910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee Engagement</td>
<td>0.926</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The study found that the mean score for employee engagement was 3.8816, indicating a significant level of engagement among the employees in the analysed organisations. This implies that there is a high level of employee engagement inside the organisation, which signifies the adoption of positive policies and practices aimed at fostering a work environment that is conducive to employee well-being. Nevertheless, there remains room for further enhancement. Among the two dimensions studied, employees' Spiritual Intelligence obtained the highest average score of 3.9621, followed by Leadership, which demonstrated its influence on employee engagement with an average score of 3.8185 (refer to Table 5).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables with mean scores.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Intelligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee Engagement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This study utilized a questionnaire to measure the independent variables, which include spiritual intelligence and Leader leadership. The dependent variable, Employee Engagement, was assessed as a composite. Information for this study was collected using a standardized questionnaire, with scores measured on a 5-point Likert scale. Pearson correlation analysis was employed to test the study objectives and various hypothesis (refer to Table 6).

- **H01**: There is no relationship between spiritual intelligence and employee engagement during the crisis situation. The analysis revealed a correlation coefficient of .759 with a significance level of .039 (p=.039) for the relationship between Spiritual Intelligence and employee engagement. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, indicating a positive and significant relationship between spiritual intelligence and employee engagement during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

- **H02**: There is no role of a leader in influencing employee engagement during the crisis. In this instance, the correlation coefficient is .821 with a significance level of .044 (p=.044). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. It can be inferred that there is a positive and significant role of a leader in influencing employee engagement during and post COVID-19 pandemic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation</th>
<th>Spiritual Intelligence</th>
<th>Leader</th>
<th>Employee Engagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Intelligence</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.759*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.821*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.044</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee Engagement</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.759*</td>
<td>.821*</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>.044</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

Correlation analysis was employed to assess the strength of association between the independent and dependent variables. The correlation coefficient analysis revealed a linear association between two variables (Bewick et al., 2003). Strong positive correlations exist between the independent variables, Employee’s Spiritual Intelligence (.759), and Leader and their Leadership role (.821), and Employee Engagement. According to a survey by McKinsey (Emmett, 2020) that polled 800 US-based employees on a range of employee experience-related topics, remote workers report higher levels of well-being, engagement, and positive work outcomes than in nonremote counterparts with less flexibility in their daily jobs. Behaviors exhibited by transformational leaders have the potential to impact on the degree of employee engagement. Implementing training programs for leaders to develop the skills of Transformational leaders should be undertaken regularly (Catteeuw et al., 2007). Employee Engagement is a fundamental aspect of intrinsic motivation, ensuring that employees work toward the broader goals of the organization. Higher engagement leads to individual proactiveness and positive behavior (Salanova & Schaufeli, 2008).

6. Limitations of the study

The research is limited to employees of Information Technology (IT) and Information Technology Enabled Services (ITES) companies based out of Bangalore, with a restricted sample size. It focuses on the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis and the new normal situation. Future studies could broaden their scope by incorporating additional variables such as emotional intelligence and social intelligence in a larger and more diverse population. Comparative analysis could also be conducted across different sectors and cities.

7. Final Considerations

Employees represent invaluable assets for any organization. Workplace spirituality programs play a beneficial role in enhancing emotional intelligence and spirituality, thereby positively impacting employee well-being and performance (Neck and Millman, 1994). Leaders are looked upon for guidance and support during crises. The challenge for leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic is twofold: making sound decisions for their workforce and setting a positive example for the future. This study revealed that employees with a high Spiritual Quotient demonstrated enhanced Employee Engagement even during crises such as COVID-19. The data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to employees of IT and ITES organizations in Bangalore. The spiritual quotient and leadership Roles were considered independent variables, while employee engagement was the dependent variable.

The job crafting theory emphasises the significance of workers actively determining their own work experiences and underscores the importance of empowering individuals to proactively redesign their job roles to enhance engagement and satisfaction in the workplace. The job crafting theory offers valuable insights into how employees can adapt and thrive in crisis situations by actively reshaping their job roles to maintain engagement, resilience, and effectiveness amidst uncertainty.
and change. The job crafting can foster resilience among employees during challenging times. By empowering individuals to modify their job roles to capitalize on their strengths and interests, job crafting enhances employees' sense of self-efficacy and mastery, enabling them to navigate crisis situations more effectively (Tims et al., 2013).

The study findings and correlation analysis indicate a positive relationship between organizations that prioritize employee welfare and employees who are willing to contribute to the organization's development. This aligns with Robinson et al.'s (2004) description of engagement as a mutually beneficial association between employers and employees. When employees receive financial and socioemotional support from their leaders, they feel compelled to reciprocate with enthusiasm and dedication, thereby enhancing employee engagement. Spiritual intelligence (SI) undeniably offers a versatile advantage in promoting problem-solving and goal achievement, enabling individuals to improve their overall quality of life. SI enables individuals to engage not only with their hands but also with their spirits or hearts (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). By fostering closer connections with their employees, leaders can enhance employee engagement and contribute to the growth and sustainability of organizations. An engaged employee demonstrates a positive attitude toward the organization's sustainability, actively contributes to its growth, and upholds its values.

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Ethical considerations
Volunteers self-declared and consented to take part in the survey questionnaire and survey results are anonymised.

Conflict of interest
The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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