

## Spiritual Orientation and Proactive Workplace Behaviour: A Qualitative Analysis

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### ARTICLE HISTORY

**Paper Nomenclature:** Theme Based Paper

**Paper Code:** GJEISV12N2AJ2020TBP1

**Submission Online at www.gjeis.com:** 13-April-2020

**Manuscript Acknowledged:** 13-April-2020

**Originality Check:** 13 & 22-April-2020

**Originality Test (Plag) Ratio (Urkund):** 10%

**Author Revert with Rectified Copy:** 14 & 22-May-2020

**Peer Reviewers Comment (Open):** 24-May-2020

**Single Blind Reviewers Remarks:** 26-May 2020

**Doble Blind Reviewers Remarks:** 28-May 2020

**Triple Blind Reviewers Remarks:** 29-March 2020

**Author Update (w.r.t. correction, suggestion & observation):** 09-June 2020

**Camera-Ready-Copy:** 13-June 2020

**Editorial Board Excerpt & Citation:** 18-June 2020

**Published Online First:** 22-June 2020

### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** Spirituality is an important aspect of individual's life. The present paper examines the spirituality and proactive workplace behaviour of at workplace.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** The qualitative study conducted in-depth interviews of 12 employees ranging from 22 years to 65 years of age and of different occupation and organizational positions by using qualitative analysis method. Qualitative analysis used in the present combined thematic and structural coding to appropriately captures the subtle aspects of work life experiences conducted by an individual via their spiritual orientation.

**Findings:** The finding indicates that spiritual orientation of an individual influences the dimensions of self-efficacy, work motivation, productivity, orientation to solve the problem as well as their ability to cope stress in organizational pressure.

**Originality/Value:** It emerges from the analysis that being proactive at work place without spiritual orientation is a manifestation of egomania and materialism. It is difficult to say whether being ego-driven and materialistic causes proactive work behaviour or it is vice-versa, holding impact of spirituality constant.

**Paper Type:** Theme Based Paper

**KEYWORDS** Spirituality | Proactive Workplace Behaviour | Self-Efficacy | Productivity | Motivation | Coping Stress | Positivism | Qualitative Analysis

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- Present Volume & Issue (Cycle): Volume 12 | Issue 2 | Apr-Jun 2020
- International Standard Serial Number:  
Online ISSN: 0975-1432 | Print ISSN: 0975-153X
- DOI (Crossref, USA) <https://doi.org/10.18311/gjeis/2020>
- Bibliographic database: OCLC Number (WorldCat): 988732114
- Impact Factor: 2.69 (GIF, Citescore, SIF), CiteFactor: 3.57 (2019-20)
- Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Subodh Kesharwani
- Frequency: Quarterly

- Published Since: 2009
- Research database: EBSCO <https://www.ebsco.com>
- Review Pedagogy: Single Blind Review/ Double Blind Review/ Triple Blind Review/ Open Review
- Copyright: ©2020 GJEIS and it's heirs
- Publisher: Scholastic Seed Inc. and KARAM Society
- Place: New Delhi, India.
- Repository (fighare): 704442/13

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## Introduction

Recently researchers have been advocating spirituality and its integration with workplace. Concepts like spiritual leadership (Fairholm, 1998), spiritual fellowship and spiritual laws of success (Chopra, 1994) are gaining interest in organizations. Spirituality can be linked with financial ramifications in an organization owing to its relationship with organisational out variables like turnover, productivity and growth (Moore and Casper, 2006). Spiritual leaders foster high level of commitment and productivity by creating better vision value congruence among the individuals and organizations. McCormick (1994) defines spirituality as an inner experience an individual has which becomes manifest in his or her behaviour. Neck and Milliman (1994) define spirituality as “expressing our desires to find meaning and purpose in our lives and is a process of living out one’s set of deeply held personal values. Spiritual orientation influences self (Megaviglia, 1999) which is an important phenomenon in psychology of individuals (Bandura, 1986b) which in turn affects the selection and construction of one’s psychological environment (Bandura, 1993). Creation of psychological environment and its constituents influences individuals’ motivation, affect and actions which direct individuals to be familiar with their potential and act accordingly (Afsar & Rehman, 2015). Hence interest in spirituality in business has been growing (Len Tischler, 1999).

At workplace, owing to taxing integration, innovativeness and all time competitiveness begets lack of quality in life. Therefore, to facilitate the work life balance notion of spirituality and spiritual leadership is inciting in organizations. Also, past reviewed studies have cited the significance of spirituality in improving the work efficiency of employee with keeping their mental peace.

## Spirituality and proactive workplace behaviour

The proactive behaviour in an organization is related to individuals’ self-direction and future orientation towards workplace activities (Bindl & Parker, 2011). Parker et al., (2006) discussed the operationalization of proactive behaviour in an organization at individual level, team level and organisational level. The present study examines the individual level proactive behaviour of employees with respect to their spiritual orientation, if it exists. At individual level, proactive behaviour of employees involves change actions or change cognition to focus on future via anticipation and change via taking control (Bindl & Parker, 2011) Also, employees, emphasis on self to direct their actions and to take charge of situation and making things happens to achieve the organizational objectives. Similarly, Spirituality operationalize on self-consciousness and self-intuition (Guillory, 2000; Cash and Gary, 2000). Moreover, it plays a critical role in self-coping and self-transformational process

(Lancaster & Palframan, 2009) and motivates individuals to change in a positive way.

Therefore, it is imperative to investigate the role of spirituality on proactive workplace behaviour to study how or to what extent spiritual orientation of employees influences them to be future focused and taking control of the circumstances. Although, Chen et al. (2019) empirically examined the concept of spiritual leadership and proactive workplace behaviour but conceptual essence of how employees’ spiritual orientation impacts the proactive workplace behaviour was absent in the study. Hence, the present study examines the spiritual orientation of employees employing qualitative research approach to attain phenomenological quintessence of the subject.

## Method

### Design

The researcher designed a few basic open ended questions to know about respondents’ understanding of spirituality, their spiritual orientation and whether they find any relationship between spirituality and proactive workplace behaviour. The questions were also directed to examine the role of spirituality in performance, motivation and coping stress. Respondents were interviewed personally as well as telephonically. Interviews took 25 minutes to 50 minutes. Their viewpoints were recorded against the open ended questions designed for the study and then summarized for analysis purpose. In this process each participants shared their witnessed situations and experiences.

### Participants

Seven women and five men were asked questions regarding spiritually, proactive workplace balance, self-efficacy, performance, motivation and coping stress. Ages ranged between 28 and 66, all of them were Indian, having educational level of post-graduation and above. Most of the respondents belonged to middle socioeconomic level and were in active employment.

### Data Analysis

The recorded transcripts were investigated and analysed according to the set of rules and procedures *w.r.t.* Qualitative Enquiry; this approach articulates individuals’ lived experiences via stories and involves researchers’ assertiveness regarding the analyses of participant’s lived experiences (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Smith, 2004). Also, qualitative analysis is an evocative and inductive approach which involves continuous recapitulation of data from initial stage. In first phase, each transcript was discretely analysed with comprehensive reading and rereading with a view to gaining familiarisation with the contents. Familiarised contents were marked on left side of the transcripts to extract the context that seems interesting

to the researchers and acknowledges the pervious literature. In second phase, emergent themes were transformed using the extracted contents to capture the essence of ideas and comments of participants. Third phase involved clustering of themes from emergent themes which were convergent. Forth phase, formulated the super-ordinate themes from sub-ordinate themes to study the commonalities. Finally we created the master themes by re-examining the convergence and divergence in all the transcripts. This rigorous case to case study improved the robustness of the data analysis as the present study included the triangulation method of collecting the data via in-depth interviews and literature, direct quotes of participants and conceptual understanding through transcripts to offer credence to researcher's analytics for interpretation and findings.

## Analysis

Respondents reported spirituality as a way to understand self, God, higher power or positive force and relationship between them. For example one of the respondents said "I believe in a supreme force which runs the entire universe" and another believed "Spirituality means knowing about God and knowing the real identity of God". Most of the respondents followed or carried their spirituality through meditation. Moreover, one of the respondents said he carried his spirituality by associating with ISCON and doing mantra meditation there. Additionally, by reading the books of Dayanand, Vivekanand and Arya Samaja few claimed to have gained spiritual knowledge. Participants also discussed about the different religions followed in India, however, they had a clarity about the fact that religion and spirituality are not synonyms. They told spirituality was beyond the boundaries of religion. Religion is confined and has limitation. For a few, spirituality was an anchor to sail through life. There is a source on which they can anchor upon and sail through all ups and downs of life. Moreover, spirituality helps them in understanding self and others. They understand other as his/her fellowmen and treat them with love and affection.

To illustrate the relationship spirituality and self efficacy they said when you know about yourself, you don't make others responsible for your actions. As in past studies it has been observed that spirituality (Megaviglia, 1999) and self efficacy (Bandura, 1986b) influence self. Similarly respondents also narrated that "spirituality is knowing about self, God and relationship between the two and self efficacy makes me understand what I am and how I can perform a given course of action". On spirituality they say they get to know self and their ability to perform a duty in life. It influences their motivational attributes, what they feel and how they behave as they believe that if they are being assigned a task or target, it has been given by the God or the supreme power. Hence, when he is the one who has been the assigned the task then he will help us in completing it. If He (God) wants this task to be completed then it will get

completed. On the other hand, if he doesn't want the task to be completed then circumstances will arise that task would not get completed. As discussed, Perceived Self – Efficacy is concerned with judgments / knowledge of how well one can execute course of action to complete tasks and reach goals (Bandura, 1982). One of the participants understood that spirituality makes individuals familiar with self, their ability and accordingly it affects their guidelines in life for any task. More than self efficacy, spirituality helps them in developing their individuality and gives them the meaning of self-worth and self-confidence. For them self-efficacy is the part of their individuality which has evolved through spirituality. According to the respondents, spirituality makes them proactive as they don't take decision just because they feel something at that point of time. Since spirituality gives them a better understanding of what they are doing and how to do the task. One of the respondents illustrated this with an example saying that "if she wants to take a political decision like to vote somebody", for her it's not a decision just taken because she feels something at a point of time. For her everything is driven by spirituality in that sense, as it gives her better understanding of what she is doing which is not influenced by money, power or any other materialist thing. Some respondents expressed that if commitment and dedication to task at hand and organisation is driven to meet the material needs, gain superior and peer approval or for upward movement in socio-economic hierarchy it is only an expression of ego. One respondent said, "Pursuit of work solely for material gains is like being a pilgrim without a soul."

Spirituality influences self consciousness (Guillory, 2000) and helps efficacious individual to complete the task in difficult situation (Bandura, 1982), as a result making them more productive. As participants believed that all task and targets are being assigned by the God to them, hence they give their best efforts by being more conscious to complete the task. One participant stated that "it makes me more conscious person that I have to complete my task. It somewhere leads to a strong consciousness that I have to keep up to the expectation of myself and what so ever is expected from me. With this I feel greater self-consciousness and it adds more conscious efforts in my method of work". Moreover, spirituality plays a vital role in self transformational process (Lancastera & Palframan, 2009) and to explain this a participant stated that "spirituality makes them aware that existence of each human being is important for us and in this process whether they are in their duty or they are at workplace or in relationship or with kids or parent, it improves everything they do." With spirituality and efficaciousness they do not find failures in others, hence their productivity increases. To illustrate this point, one respondent narrated that in my first organization I quoted wrong prices in a tender and suffered a loss. I was called in a meeting of board as a consequence of my mistake. I thought I will be terminated from my job, however, my immediate superior took the responsibility of my mistake by saying it





was his accountability to check the quotation. So I believe spirituality makes other more humble and positive. After this incident I have always checked my work twice and my performance improved.”

Moreover, spirituality makes a human being more humble and altruistic and everyone likes their positive behavior in personal and professional life. Spirituality gives the feeling of contentment as they don't feel running after something. Spirituality gives time to think and avoid impulsive decision. Before taking any decision they observe the things and then understand what is right or wrong for them, institution and society. This actually helps them in delivering superior performance at workplace. Few of the respondents quoted the examples of Mahatma Gandhi and Swami Dayanand that how they devoted their efforts for the betterment of the society. They used to work 24\*7 for the society by keeping their own personal interest zero. One who is capable of giving to the society should not help others out of mercy but it should be his/ her duty to serve the society. Spirituality makes you understand what one's duty is towards others, their family, workplace and society which motivate an individual for better performance.

Participants believed that god has sent them for some purpose and prescribed duties, this motivates them to complete the task assigned to them. Moreover, self-confidence and modesty are motivational attributes of spirituality. As self-efficacy plays a critical role in self-regulation of motivation and spirituality stimulates one's belief that one must complete the assigned or assumed goals. To many, spirituality gives them positive force and they synergise their energies in completing the task assigned in any situation. For example, a participant narrated his experience that when he joined his workplace as a librarian, he used to devote 12 to 14 hours in library and classified 50,000 books by making catalogue himself. As stated that he was motivated to give best to his workplace and society as he was driven by the belief that giving is another name of spirituality. According to respondents spirituality makes them understand their duties and their self belief encourages them complete their duties with right code of conduct.

Many respondents stated that in the process of meditation we sit in peace and talk to self, this made them relaxed and stress free. Moreover, stress arises when individual runs after materialist and worldly things. Spirituality makes an individual understand that his purpose on this earth to serve the God and thaall targets are assigned by God only. Since this gets internalised stress does not arise. Moreover, there are other friends with similar spiritual orientation and scriptures like Bhagwad Gita which guide them and give direction at the time of hassle. Performing mantra meditation and chanting the holy name of God is a powerful thing in itself and it removes the anxiety at hard times. A few responded that in spirituality when they have somebody to talk to, fight

with and cling on, cry with or to complain and there is force they can rely upon. Furthermore, when they surrender to that force or energy, they do not feel stress. For example, when a child goes somewhere with parents they do carefree that parents will take care of me, it's kind of surrender. They even don't think while crossing road or going anywhere because they trust they will be taken care by their parents. Similarly, if we can have same kind of understanding with this power and can surrender ourselves then we have that kind of confidence that we are being taken care of and then actually you don't have stress at all.

## Discussion

The qualitative analysis of the transcripts in the study provides an insight into the consciousness of the spiritually oriented individual.

First, they all display a value system in which they perceive themselves as entities with a purpose assigned by a higher power, God. It provides them a world view in which all tasks mean to serve a higher purpose than performing the tasks on a mere quid pro quo basis. They therefore, bring a value system to work organisations which are modelled around the concepts of maximising profit as enshrined in the classical economic theory or the concept of economic/social contract between the employer and employee. It can be inferred from this that spiritually oriented persons are likely to be driven by intrinsic motivation rather than external rewards. There is a considerable element of altruism in performing the workplace duties. This is because the tasks are being as an accountability to inner self and the higher power. The aspects of proactive workplace behaviour were clearly discernible in the narratives of spirituality oriented persons. They evinced an attitude of being proactive at workplace in assuming the responsibility for what happens at work place, as they felt accountable to Higher Power. Therefore they were willing to take charge of the situation whenever circumstances demanded and consider making things happens to achieve the organizational objectives as their duty and accountability to their conscience. Self coping and self-transformation comes fairly naturally them. It can be therefore asserted that high spiritual orientation . Self-transcendence is the key element in being the driving force for the workplace behaviour. Figure 1 presents this inference diagrammatically. The self perception of being entities whose purpose is defined by Higher Power phenomenologically implies transcending the self and self-interest at work place. The figure does not aim at presenting the flow of causality among various variables. Instead following the tradition of qualitative analysis the figure is aimed providing new leads for building hypotheses for future research. While the qualitative analysis carried out in this study indicates that spirituality leads to proactive work behaviour due to spirituality concomitants like altruism and self-transcendence. It cannot be asserted with confidence whether proactive workplace behaviour

and spirituality are independent dimensions in terms of their description as behavioural constructs. Also, while our analysis demonstrates that the role of altruism and self-transcendence is that of mediators, it needs to be explored further through quantitative research whether these variables are playing the role of moderating the relationship between proactive workplace behaviour and spirituality.

**Figure-1: Mapping Spiritual orientation and proactive workplace behaviour**

<b>Spiritual Orientation</b>	<i>High</i>	Coping stress Positivism Self-Efficacy	Altruism Self-transcendence
	<i>Low</i>	High Stress High Productivity Self-Believer	Egomania Acquisitive
		<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>
		<b>Proactive workplace behaviour</b>	

Source: Author

Secondly, respondents admitted to being surrendered to Higher Power. The belief system resting on the idea that Higher power does everything and takes care, becomes a source of confidence in performing all tasks at hand. It led to superior sense of self efficacy, self-worth and self-confidence. These attributes have been shown to be positively related to superior performance, initiative and achievement motivation. It is well known that during crisis self-worth and self-efficacy are most enabling for making articulated, well balanced responses to the situation. Lack of self efficacy and self-worth often results in panic. Spiritually oriented individuals armed with a belief that everything is guided by the Higher Power see unusual situations as a 'play' of the Power and therefore are able to face them with aplomb and needed calmness. Finally, the belief in the Higher Power as their anchor and ultimate doer results in either stress not arising at all or in providing them a strong mechanism of releasing that stress.

Finally, It emerges from the analysis that being proactive at work place without spiritual orientation is a manifestation of egomania and materialism. It is difficult to say whether being ego-driven and materialistic causes proactive work behaviour or it is vice-versa, holding impact of spirituality constant. Further investigation in this aspect of determinants of proactive work behaviour and various other insights provided by our qualitative analysis could guide future research.

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## Annexure 1

Submission Date	Submission Id	Word Count	Character Count
13 & 22-April-2020	D78974935 (Urkund )	4543	31011



**U R K U N D**

Urkund Analysis Result

**Analysed Document:** Spiritual orientatio and Proactive Workplace Behavior-R1.docx (D78974935)

**Submitted:** 9/11/2020 4:25:00 PM

**Submitted By:** skesharwani@ignou.ac.in

**Significance:** 10 %

Sources included in the report:

Spiritual wellbeing and Proactive Workplace Behavior.pdf (D78727643)

Instances where selected sources appear: 8

*Author had initially send a paper for originality check and was found more than a prescribe percentages afterwards it was rectified and send again by an author and found suitable.*

### Reviewers Comment



#### Reviewer Comment 1:

The author has chosen the right technique for qualitative data collection i.e. interview. The paper is designed with a good structure and interesting topic. The author has provided a number of references for readers to gain an in-depth knowledge of the subject matter.

#### Reviewer Comment 2:

The paper is well structured and supported with the available literature. The sample size of the study is quite short; it further provides the scope for the other researchers to conduct a study by covering a large sample size.

#### Reviewer Comment 3:

The paper aims to analyse the spirituality and the proactive behaviour of the employees which is a thought provoking and a contemporary concept in its own as not much of the study is available on the theme. The paper is well supported giving proper citation wherever required.

### Editorial Excerpt



The article has 10% of plagiarism which is accepted percentage as per the norms and standards of the journal for the publication. As per the editorial board's observations and blind reviewers' remarks the paper had some minor revisions which were communicated on a timely basis to the authors (Chandra & Nitika) and accordingly all the corrections had been incorporated as and when directed and required to do so. The comments related to this manuscript are noticeable related to "**Spiritual Orientation and Proactive Workplace Behaviour**" both subject-wise and research-wise. The paper aims to analyse the spirituality and the proactive behaviour of employees at the workplace with the qualitative research method by the means of 12 in-depth interviews across occupation and organizational position. With the analysis of the results spiritual orientation was found to influence the dimensions of self-efficacy, work motivation, productivity, orientation to solve the problems and ability to cope stress in organizational pressure. The paper is well written and some important considerations are highlighted. Overall, the paper promises to provide a strong base for the further studies in the area. After comprehensive reviews and editorial board's remarks the manuscript has been categorised and decided to publish under "**Theme Based Paper**" category.

### Acknowledgement



I am grateful for the insightful comments offered by the anonymous peer reviewers and the editorial team of GJEIS. The generosity and expertise of one and all have improved this study in innumerable ways.

### Disclaimer



The opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not reflect the views of the GJEIS. The author has made every effort to ensure that the information in this paper is correct, any remaining errors and deficiencies is solely the responsibility of the author.



Chandra Shekhar Sharma and Nitika Sharma  
"Spiritual Orientation and Proactive Workplace Behaviour:  
A Qualitative Analysis"  
Volume-12, Issue-2, Apr-Jun, 2020. ([www.gjeis.com](http://www.gjeis.com))

Volume-12, Issue-2, Apr-Jun, 2020  
Online ISSN : 0975-1432, Print ISSN : 0975-153X  
Frequency : Quarterly, Published Since : 2009

Google Citations: Since 2009  
H-Index = 96  
i10-Index: 964

Source: <https://scholar.google.co.in/citations?user=S47TtNkAAAAJ&hl=en>



**Conflict of Interest:** Author of a Paper had no conflict neither financially nor academically.

