

## Workplace Spirituality and Employee Performance of Manufacturing Firms in River State, Nigeria

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**Abstract:** *This study examined the relationship between workplace spirituality and employee performance of manufacturing firms in Rivers State. The study was carried adopted a cross sectional survey and was obtained based on an estimated sample of 302 workers within the manufacturing firms. In this study, workplace spirituality was operationalized using sense of community while employee performance was operationalized using creativity and efficiency. The tests of hypotheses were carried out using the Spearman Rank order correlation coefficient at a 0.05 level of significance. The reliability of the instrument was achieved using the Crombach Alpha Coefficient with all the items being above 0.7. The results from the tests reveal that there is a significant relationship between workplace spirituality and employee performance. We therefore recommended that supportive systems and collaborative work should be encouraged through the development of work groups or teams within the workplace. Employees should be allowed to contribute and partake as a significant member within the groups and the organization as a whole. Effort should also be made to offer support and encouragement towards employees with regards to their work and role expectations.*

**Keywords:** *Workplace Spirituality, Employee Performance, Sense of Community, Creativity and Efficiency*

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### INTRODUCTION

Organizations are facing increased competition due to globalization, changes in technology, political and economic environments (Evans, Pucik & Barsoux, 2002) and therefore prompting these organizations to address issues related to their employees as one of the ways to prepare them to adjust to the increases above and thus enhance their performance. It is important to not ignore the prevailing evidence on growth of knowledge in the business corporate world in the last decade. This growth has not only been brought about by improvements in technology nor a combination of factors of production but increased efforts towards development of organizational human resources.

The success of any organization is closely tied to the job performance of its employees. The quality of the employees' workplace environment impacts on their motivation level and hence performance (Heath, 2006). When employees have the desire, physically and emotionally to work, then their performance shall be increased (Boles *et al.*, 2004). Armstrong (2006) defines performance as the development of quantified objectives. Performance is not only a matter of what people achieves but how they achieve. Performance defined by Sultana *et al.* (2012) as the achievement of specified tasks against predetermined or identified standards of accuracy, completeness, cost and speed.

High performance is a step towards the achievement of organizational goals and tasks. Frese and Sonnentag (2001) opined that an individual performance is highly important for an organization as a whole and the individuals working in it. Organizations need highly performing employees in order to meet their goals and to deliver the products and services they are specialized in and finally to achieve a competitive advantage. They also stated that having a proper workplace environment helps in reducing the number of absenteeism and as a result can increase the performance in today's competitive and dynamic business world.

Various authors have identified and pointed out that spiritual development can meet the challenge of distressing employees for various individual factors; (Benson & Roehlkepartain, 2008; Flaxmana & Bonda, 2010; Locander & Weinberg, 2014). Only in recent times have the value of workplace spirituality weighed in on the minds of managers, Sheng and Chen (2012) indicated that Spirituality in the workplace is a new field, and significantly related to individuals, organizations, and social physical and mental health, including organizational support, organizational commitment, and internal work satisfaction. Yogesh and Srishti (2010) concluded that Workplace spirituality plays a significant role in establishing a strong, well understood, and encouraging positive organizational culture by enhancing employee motivational level and in improving employee productivity, and organizational performance.

Spirituality is defined by Myers, Sweeney and Witmer (2000) as personal and private beliefs that transcend the material aspects of life and give a deep sense of wholeness, connectedness, and openness to the infinite. In the work situation there is horizontal spirituality which is the desire to be of service to other people and is demonstrated by service orientation and a deep concern for one's fellow workers (Ajala, 2013). Consideration towards others (showing concern) and the existence of high quality interpersonal working relationships lead to high levels of job satisfaction, low staff turnover, and enhanced group cohesion, group performance and group efficiency (Ajala, 2013). Ultimately, these circumstances increase productivity. Spirituality at the workplace, according to Petchsawange and Duchon (2012) has a positive effect on human activity and enhances personal development, compassion, meaningfulness and joy at work simultaneously promoting honesty, trust, job commitment, and wellbeing of employees. Spirituality in the workplace can be called spiritual work wellness and is often included as one of the dimensions of employee wellness programmes identified as spiritual wellness.

Many may take spirituality in the form of religious observance, prayer, meditation or a belief in a higher power and for others, it can be found in nature, music, art or a secular community. Workplace spirituality may have certain benefits; it can help a person in focusing on personal and later to organizational goals. Spirituality gives employees concern for that which is unseen and intangible, as opposed to physical or mundane. According to Albanese (1990), spirituality has to do with the human beings' awareness of details in existence and it revealed in-depth

connections. Workplace spirituality may help employees to uncover what's most meaningful in their life. This Spirituality provides the realization of being connected to oneself and with the world; this will in turn lead to inner peace during difficult times. Moreover, spirituality helps in releasing control, expanding one's support network and above all live a healthier life.

In recent times the business environment is a place where the society spends most of its time in the workplace, therefore an understanding of the connection between spirituality and work value could provide a better picture to prepare managers on how best to handle the relationship. And it could also provide educational institutions a better picture as to how best to prepare future managers. Biberman and Whitty (1997) in examining spirituality in workplace indicated that workers have to understand their role and how they can add-value to the organization rather than expecting the organization to provide a lifetime employment. Many years ago, Harari (1993) has already predicted that the future will be a period where workers who can add value to the organization will stand better chance/opportunities than those who cannot.

This piece of research is spurred by the void left by previous research works on workplace spirituality in connection to employee performance in the Nigerian context. And will contribute to efforts towards the pool of knowledge on the total business environment. Mojinyinola (2012) discussed spirituality in the recovery of patients in health care sector, while (Mojinyinola & Ajala, 2012; Ajala & Mojinyinola, 2013) discussed the place of spirituality in the curriculum of Social Work Courses in Nigeria. Research has not been done on the impact of workplace spirituality on employee performance in Nigeria. On this note, there exists a literature gap which our study tends to cover. Our point of departure therefore, is to empirically investigate the impact of workplace spirituality on employee performance of manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers state, Nigeria.

This study was guided by the following research questions:

- i. What is the relationship between sense of community and creativity in manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State?
- ii. What is the relationship between sense of community and efficiency in manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Theoretical Foundation**

#### **Spiritual Leadership Theory**

Spiritual leadership theory is concerned with the creation of an intrinsically motivated, learning organization. The theory of spiritual leadership was developed within an intrinsic motivation model that incorporates vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love, theories of workplace spirituality, and spiritual survival/wellbeing.

Having received increased attention in the organizational sciences, workplace spirituality is a fast-growing area of research and inquiry, with important implications for leadership theory, research, and practice (Hill, 2013). To date, the most developed and tested theory of workplace spirituality is the model of spiritual leadership proposed by Fry (2008), Fry and Nisiewicz

(2013), and Fry, Matherly and Ouimet (2010). Fry's (2003) initial model of spiritual leadership was developed within an intrinsic motivation framework that incorporated spiritual leadership (i.e., vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love) and spiritual well-being (i.e., calling and membership).

The purpose of spiritual leadership is to create vision and value congruence across the strategic, empowered team and individual levels. Ultimately, it should foster higher levels of important individual and organizational outcomes such as organizational commitment and productivity, financial performance, employee life satisfaction, and corporate social responsibility (Fry *et al.*, 2010; Fry & Nisiewicz, 2013).

Essential to spiritual leadership are the key processes of:

1. Creating a transcendent vision of service to others whereby one experiences a sense of calling so that one's life has purpose and meaning and makes a difference.
2. Establishing or reinforcing an organizational culture based on the values of altruistic love whereby one has a sense of membership, feels understood and appreciated, and has genuine care, concern, and appreciation for *both* self and others.

Fry (2005b) extended spiritual leadership theory by exploring developments in SRW, character ethics, positive psychology, and spiritual leadership. He argued that these areas provide a consensus on the values, attitudes, and behaviours necessary for health, psychological and ethical well-being, and, ultimately, corporate social responsibility.

Fry (2008) further revised the spiritual leadership model to include inner life and life satisfaction. One's inner life, or spiritual practice, as a fundamental source of inspiration and insight, positively influences development of (a) hope/faith in a transcendent vision of service to key stakeholders and (b) the values of altruistic love. Inner life affects individuals' perceptions about who they are, what they are doing, and what they are contributing (Vaiil, 1998).

### **Workplace Spirituality**

"Spirituality" as explained by Shen and Chen (2013) is an abstract concept and not easily defined, thus, there were various definitions. Spirituality does not necessarily refer to religious doctrines. It could be some one's philosophy, values, or meaning of life, Farangai (2016) sees Spirituality as a force energy, motivation, inspiration, spirit and life the constant search for meaning, purpose, destiny, particular. Many researchers considered spirituality as a source of stability for the organization which can realize the performance and the effectiveness of Divine help for different people depending on their attitude or worldview has several meanings. Here the spiritual life, necessarily belong to one of the established religions historically, it means having an attitude to the world and people to people peace, happiness and hope.

Workplace spirituality can be defined as "the recognition that employees have an inner life that nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work that takes place in the context of community" (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000 as cited by Charoensukmongkol *et al.*, 2015). In line with Ashmos and Duchon (2000) workplace spirituality encompasses three dimensions: sense of community, meaningful work, and inner life. They noted that the first dimension is as regards the connection that the employee has with other human beings in the workplace, the second dimension is about

conducting activities at work that give meaning to the person's life and the third one is concerning the understanding of one's power and its use in the workplace.

Workplace spirituality emerged as a crucial factor for organizational development and effectiveness in past few years. Although, the subject of workplace spirituality is relatively new to organizational studies, interest in it has grown significantly over the past two decades and researchers, academicians, professional and psychologists has started to focus on it as an interesting phenomenon of study. Spirituality at workplace plays an important role for any organization's success in present scenario (Kumar & Kumar, 2015).

In research, workplace spirituality has been found to contribute positively to some individual outcomes. Kolodinsky (2003) noted that this contribution can be understood as a person organization fit (P-O fit), which is defined as "judgments of congruence between an employee's personal values and an organizational culture" (Cable & DuRue, 2002: 875). Kolodinsky, (2008) stated that when a strong fit exists between the employee's values and the organization's values, a positive relationship with individual outcomes will be seen. Milliman *et al.* (2003) reported that workplace spirituality dimensions are not only positively related to organizational commitment but also negatively related to the intention to quit.

Contemporary evidence supports the statement that many employees in today's workplaces feel unappreciated, unconnected, lost and insecure in their jobs (Sparrow and Cooper, 2003; Meyer & Allen, 1997). Several researchers found that employees began to feel distanced, vulnerable, and cynical as a result of downsizing, restructuring, reengineering, delaying, layoffs, and other current changes in organizations (Biberman & Whitty, 1997).

Research suggests that the development and expression of the spirit at work may indeed solve these problems of stress and burnout, as well as have beneficial consequences for the well-being of employees. Reave (2005) mentions the review of Emmons (1999) that summarizes seven studies that have reported "a significant correlation between spirituality and mental health indices of life satisfaction, happiness, self-esteem, hope and optimism, and meaning in life" (p. 667).

There is growing evidence in spirituality research that workplace spirituality programs result in positive individual level outcomes for employees such as increased joy, serenity, job satisfaction and commitment (Burack, 1999; Krishnakumar and Neck, 2002; Fry, 2003, 2005). There is also evidence that these programs improve organizational productivity and reduce absenteeism and turnover (Fry, 2003, 2005). Milliman, Czaplewski, and Ferguson (2003) found a positive correlation between workplace spirituality and employee attitudes such as commitment to the organization, intrinsic work satisfaction, and job involvement. Neck and Milliman (1994) claim spirituality values have positive effects on both personal well-being and job performance.

### **Sense of Community**

This refers to interpersonal and profound connections and relationships. In other words, the employees had in-depth interactions with others, which enhanced mutual inner feelings and even sympathy with others' inner selves. Brown (2003) indicated that in the workplace, community development or work group consultations tends to result in workplace spirituality. However, this

community relationship should be based on trust, support, communication, and sincere care. Thus, the employees in the organization would care for and support each other as families.

Sense of community, could be considered a key factor that encourages employees to perform both OCBI and OCBO. As mentioned earlier, sense of community is about working in a place where employees can feel that there is a strong connection among the coworkers (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). From this definition, employees with a high sense of community are more likely to demonstrate pro-social behavior, which is the willingness to help, protect, or promote the welfare of others (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1990). Therefore, this pro-social behavior that employees have in their workplace can motivate them to make discretionary contributions to help their coworker and the organization beyond their regular responsibilities (Li *et al.*, 2010). Also, Manion and Bartholomew (2004) noted that when a sense of community exists in a workplace, individuals and groups will be characterized by inclusivity, commitment of the members, the ability to form consensus, a sense of realism, a contemplative nature, and a sense of safety.

As a result of the failure of trust in institutions; employees are searching for a sense of community, high quality connections (Dutton and Heaphy, 2003) and compassion at work (Frost, 2006). Because of the decline of local communities and social groups that establish a sense of connectedness (Conger, 1994) and the dissolution of traditional support systems such as the church and family (Leigh, 1997); workplaces have replaced them as primary sources of community for many people. It is also known that employees are seeking ways and means to connect to each other and to be united in a common vision that goes beyond materialistic aims (Miller, 1998). According to them, these characteristics will help create the environment of mutual trust that encourages employees to devote themselves to help other employees and the organization.

### **Employee Performance**

Workers performance is of great importance to the organization because it communicates the overall performance and development of the organization to its members as well (Bohlander *et al.*, 2001). In the discipline of human resource management, different writers suggest the following indicators for measuring employee performance and they include: efficiency in terms of cost, effectiveness with regards to quality that can be measured by percentage of work output that must be redone or is rejected; Customer satisfaction that can be measured by the number of royal customers and customer feedback. Also, timeliness, measured in terms of how fast work is performed by the employee when given a certain task; absenteeism/tardiness observed when employees absent themselves from work; and achievement of objectives measured when an employee has surpassed his/her set targets, he/she is then considered to have performed well to achieve objectives (Hakala, 2008; Armstrong, 2006).

Various studies have been carried out on workplace environment as a factor that determines employee performance. In his study, Tamessek (2009) analyzed the extent to which employees perceive their workplace environment as fulfilling their intrinsic, extrinsic, and social needs and their need to stay in the organization. He also analyzed the impact of perception of workplace environments on employee commitment and turnover in the organization, he concluded that if the employees are provided with enabling workplace environmental support, they will be highly satisfied and show high level of commitment towards their organization and hence low turnover rate.

Armstrong (2009) focused especially on those factors involved in stimulating an individual to put effort into something, since this is the basis of motivation. Cole (2004) indicates that management can achieve high performance when employees see their membership of a work group to be 'supportive', that is to say when they experience a sense of personal worth and importance from belonging to it. High producing managers and supervisors tend to foster just such relationships with and within their groups.

A performance appraisal system is important to any organizational work performance because it determines the organizational success or failure (Nyaoga, Simeon & Magutu, April 7, 2010). Managers design an environment for performance when they see that verifiable goals are set, strategies are developed and communicated, and plans to achieve objectives are made (Wehrich & Koontz, 2001). They create an effective environment when they make sure that control tools, information and approaches furnish people with the feedback knowledge they must have for effective motivation (ibid).

Performance feedback creates opportunities for learning and the energy so critical for a culture of thriving (Gretchen & Christine, Jan/Feb 2012). By resolving feelings of uncertainty, feedback keeps people's work-related activities focused on personal and organizational goals and the quicker and more direct the feedback is the more useful it is (ibid). According to Nyaoga, Simeon & Magutu (April 7, 2010) employees should be appraised at least once a year as this will contribute to increased employee efficiency, productivity and morale. The appraisal process offers a valuable opportunity to focus on work activities and goals as well as identify and correct existing problems and to encourage better performance.

## **Measures of Employee Performance**

### **Employee Creativity**

According to conventional wisdom, creativity is something that creative people have or do (Amabile, 1997). Creative individuals have several features that distinguish them from their less creative peers, that is, they have a rich body of domain-relevant knowledge and well-developed skills; they find their work intrinsically motivating; they tend to be independent, unconventional, and greater risk takers; and they have wide interests and a greater openness to new experiences (Amabile, 1997). Creativity is derived from an individual's accumulated creative thinking skills and expertise based on their formal educations and past experiences (Gong, 2009).

In some studies, creativity is considered to be a personal characteristic with features that include broad areas of interest and high energy levels (King & Gurland, 2007). An understanding of organizational creativity will necessarily involve understanding (a) the creative process, (b) the creative product, (c) the creative person, (d) the creative situation, and (e) the way in which each of these components interacts with the others (Amabile, 1997). Creativity is important to organizations because creative contributions can not only help organizations become more efficient and more responsive to opportunities, but also help organizations adapt to change, grow and compete in the global market. Researchers have mentioned that some level of creativity is needed in almost any job (Amabile, 1997).

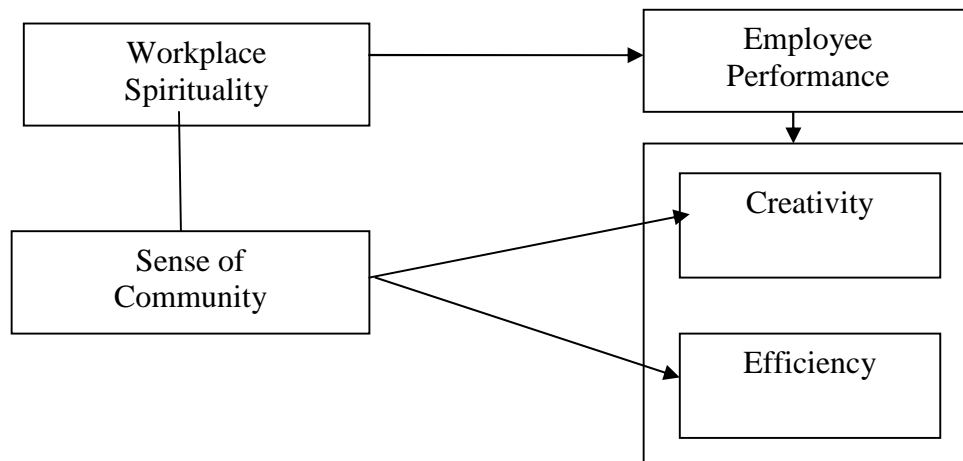
## **Employee efficiency**

Employees' efficiency is deemed to be the fulfillment of employees' obligation, in a manner that releases the firm from all liabilities. Employees' efficiency measures show firms' employees are able to convert inputs into useful outputs within standard time (Damson & Maguire, 2003). Employees' efficiency is measured by sales revenue per employee ratio. This ratio serves as a gauge of personnel productivity that simply measures the amount of revenue generated per employee (Lewis, 1972). Companies that operate on labour intensive could face the challenge of poor productivity when employee's earned wages or salaries are defaulted. As a result, financial decision would be made in order to be efficient in operating expenses, which is one of the key determinants of a firm's productivity (Sandeep, 2012).

From the foregoing point of view, we hereby hypothesized thus:

**Ho<sub>1</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between sense of community and employee creativity in the manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

**Ho<sub>2</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between sense of community and employee efficiency in the manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.



**Fig.1:** Operational Framework for the hypothesized relationship between work place spirituality and employee performance.

**Source:** Author's Desk Research, 2018

## **METHODOLOGY**

The population for this study comprises all registered and functional manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers state which numbers 39 drawn from the directory of the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN), but since it is not possible to access all 39 firms given the extremely large population size, the accessible population will be made up of 5 manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt. Rivers state chapter, which totals a number of 1226 of workers drawn from their Human Resource Based data culled by the researcher. The sample size for the study therefore was 302. Descriptive statistics and Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient for data analysis and hypothesis testing with the help of the SPSS version 23 package.



## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Bivariate Analysis

Data analysis was carried out using the Spearman rank order correlation tool at a 95% confidence interval. Specifically, the tests cover a  $H_0$  hypothesis that was bivariate and declared in the null form. We have based on the statistic of Spearman Rank ( $\rho$ ) to carry out the analysis. The level of significance 0.05 is adopted as a criterion for the probability of accepting the null hypothesis in ( $p > 0.05$ ) or rejecting the null hypothesis in ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**Table 1 Sense of community and the employee performance**

		Sense	Creativity	Efficiency
Sense	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.634**	.701**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
	N	242	242	242
Creativity	Correlation Coefficient	.634**	1.000	.607**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
	N	242	242	242
Efficiency	Correlation Coefficient	.701**	.607**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
	N	242	242	242

Source: Research survey, 2018

**$H_{01}$ : There is no significant relationship between sense of community and employee creativity in manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt:**

The result for this hypothetical statement indicates that there is a significant relationship between the variables. The evidence shows that at a  $\rho = .634$  and a  $P < 0.05$ , sense of community significantly impacts on employee creativity. Consequently, the hypothesis is considered as false and therefore rejected based on the lack of statistical evidence to prove otherwise.

**$H_{02}$ : There is no significant relationship between sense of community and employee efficiency in manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt:**

The result for this hypothetical statement indicates that there is a significant relationship between the variables. The evidence shows that at a  $\rho = .701$  and a  $P < 0.05$ , sense of community significantly impacts on employee efficiency. Consequently, the hypothesis is considered as false and therefore rejected based on the lack of statistical evidence to prove otherwise.

### Discussion of Findings

The evidence from the analysis reveals the variables as being substantial characteristics which are apparent within the manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt. The results show that workplace spirituality through its dimension sense of community is an evident and well recognized feature

of the manufacturing firms. This goes to indicate that there exists within this organizations practices and activities that promote and encourage spirituality expressions and practices.

In this vein, employee performance is also observed to be well expressed and thus significant features of the manufacturing firms as well. Workers within the organization identify behaviour such as creativity and efficiency as dominant and significantly characterizing their functions within the organization. The descriptive statistics for both measures are revealed to be significant and strongly reflected in the actions and behaviour of workers within the manufacturing firms in Rivers State.

In essence, sense of community is well represented and manifested within the context of the study. The results reinforce the assertions and models presented by scholars (Brown, 2003; Schwartz & Bilsky, 1990; Li *et al.*, 2010) which consider community and workplace support systems as integrating platforms which enhance employees' sense of belongingness and as such improves performance. Although, the cluster of hypotheses for this relationship are all rejected, the evidence serves as a strong empirical base for previous observations which link employees' sense of community to their increased capacities for creativity and efficiency within the workplace. It also ensures and drives the bonding and openness to cooperation between the workers (Brown, 2003).

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

In conclusion, this study affirms that workplace spirituality is important and critical for employee performance within manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt. The study asserts that the support and evidence of sense of community significantly impact and enhance the extent to which employees within manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt are creative and efficient in their work and roles within the organization.

Based on the findings obtained from summary of discussion and empirical findings the following recommendations are made:

- i. Supportive systems and collaborative work should be encouraged through the development of work groups or teams within the workplace. Employees should be allowed to contribute and partake as a significant member within the groups and the organization as a whole. Effort should also be made to offer support and encouragement towards employees with regards to their work and role expectations.

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