

## Chapter 16

# Spiritual Approach Among Techies: An Approach for Achieving Sustainable Development

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### Abstract

In this chapter, we explain the significance and need for a spiritual approach among techies that would help them be human-centric, compassionate and value-based for sustainable development. We introduced four perspectives of workplace spirituality, higher purpose, interconnectedness, meaningfulness and mindfulness, as significant indicators of sustainable behaviour among the techies. Finally, we discuss how a spiritual approach could help techies contribute to sustainable development. We contribute to the literature by elucidating the role of spirituality among techies that could help advance sustainable technological development and techie's well-being.

*Keywords:* Techies; sustainable development; workplace spirituality; mindfulness; interconnectedness; higher purpose; meaningfulness

### Introduction

Techies contribute to the country's technological innovation and economic development by applying their expertise in advancing technology. The workers in technology-related occupations are called techies. These employees could be engineers or technicians with skills and expertise in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) (Harrigan et al., 2018). They play an essential role in product development by creating new products and processes (Harrigan et al., 2018; Tambe & Hitt, 2012, 2014). They are central to crafting, planning and leading R&D for technological developments, that is, from product conceptualisation to its realisation in practice. The processes of conceptualisation to practice require techies to have technical skills, be creative and be innovative. They have immense responsibilities that route in from managing to leading

several projects and enhancing productivity. Techies have dual responsibilities as they have responsibilities towards their immediate users and indirectly towards end users. Thus, techies directly and significantly influence the quality of life for all humanity and the environment.

However, with the fast-growing technological disruptions happening in this world, sociopolitical and economic pressures may hinder the ethical conduct of the techies, and they may experience dissonances in their values and work expectations (Wijesinghe et al., 2021). In today's era of globalisation, their contribution has been vast for making the advancement of technological innovation and achieving profits, but this has been achieved at the cost of depletion of natural resources that may have a negative impact on the environment through techie's unsustainable behaviour. Being a part of such activities could have been an exhausting experience for them. Techies require a balanced mind to develop technical solutions and design technology, and spirituality has the potential to balance. Spirituality at work is essential for humanising the process (Daniel, 2014). Techies can learn to focus and concentrate better on their projects or work they do. The work they do is very significant not only from an industrial or commercial perspective but also from a social perspective. In this vein, the main objective of the chapter is to explicate the significance of spirituality among techies for sustainable behaviour.

In this chapter, we introduced four perspectives of workplace spirituality, higher purpose, interconnectedness, meaningfulness and mindfulness as significant indicators of sustainable behaviour among the techies.

Techies have accountability towards their job and society; for that, they need to have a stable mind that will help them work with integrity, honesty, compassion and ethics. Therefore, the study of spirituality among techies is significant for making them more responsible towards themselves, society and the environment. Thus, in this chapter, we propose that spirituality would play a vital role in cultivating holistic development among techies.

## **Sustainable Development**

The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) defined sustainable development as 'the development by satisfying the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (WCED, 1987). Further, there has been alarming concern over sustainability, for example, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions resulting from economic activity (Adebayo et al., 2022). CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are prominent for their influence on environmental degradation in the form of pollution, and technological innovation plays an important role in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (Adebayo et al., 2022; Ahmed & Le, 2021; Bekun et al., 2021; Li et al., 2021a, 2021b, 2021c). Adebayo et al. (2022) assert the need to invest in technological innovation for sustainable development. Oláh et al. (2020) argue the need for strengthening the technology through a sustainable model since there is a gap between Industry 4.0 and sustainability in practice. In today's era of globalisation, the emergence of Industry 4.0 could play a vital role in efficient,

sustainable production, but its related technologies, e.g. the Internet of Things (IoT), however, have a negative influence on environmental sustainability as a result of air pollution, discharge of waste and the exhaustive use of raw materials, information and energy (Oláh et al., 2020). Club of Rome (2019) suggested to the EU President the need to ensure that exponential technologies, artificial intelligence (AI) and digitalisation are enhanced for people, the planet and prosperity through delivering a low-carbon, sustainable, socially just, well-being oriented society (Bohnsack et al., 2022). Thus, sustainable development is the need of the hour.

Sustainable development strategy endorses that organisations should build economic markets and profits without natural resource depletion (Gladwin & Nordstrom, 1992; Hart, 1994; Jansen & Vergragt, 1992). Sustainable development emphasises achieving balance between people's well-being, preserving environmental resources and economic prosperity. Therefore, to have sustainable development of the organisation, it is significant to cultivate a holistic perspective for choosing routine strategy, shared vision (Hart & Brady, 2005). Thus, we propose that spirituality would play a significant role in cultivating a holistic perspective among techies for sustainable development.

## **Workplace Spirituality**

Workplace spirituality is defined as the inner life nurtured by meaningful work and a sense of connectedness within the community (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). Fry (2003) stated that workplace spirituality comprises individuals and organisations seeking work through a spiritual path or an opportunity to grow and contribute to society in a meaningful way. When a person's inner self is directed towards his work and sense of community in the work environment, it is known as workplace spirituality (Daniel, 2010; Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2008). Workplace spirituality is defined as where employees express themselves in terms of meaningful work, interconnectedness and purpose in their life that connect them to their work (Sorakraikitikul & Siengthai, 2014, p. 178). From an organisational perspective, workplace spirituality is defined as the nature of the organisation's spiritual values that facilitate employees' spiritual values and sense of interconnectedness (Van der Walt, 2018).

Workplace spirituality, individual spirituality and organisational spirituality are three different dimensions (Pawar, 2017). Individual spirituality means human relationships with higher power (Fry, 2003), transcendence and their feeling of interconnectedness with others (Zinnbauer et al., 1999). According to Weitz et al. (2012, p. 256), spiritual organisations are value-driven, guided by a mission and vision and socially responsible. The organisation should recognise and value employees by emphasising their spiritual development and well-being (Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2008, p. 262). Workplace spirituality is related to employees' experience in terms of meaningfulness in work and community at work (Pawar, 2017).

Further, extant literature reports many positive benefits of spirituality at the workplace; spirituality increases employees' resilience to handle workplace stress (Cash & Gray, 2000). Spirituality can be beneficial for the inner development of the employees, along with instrumental benefits (Brophy, 2015). Spirituality in the workplace can benefit employees by improving inner effectiveness (Pfeffer, 2003). It bestows intrinsic strength, improves mental well-being, makes human beings mindful of themselves and encourages individual development. Therefore, workplace spirituality is undoubtedly a human need that cannot be overlooked (Hart & Brady, 2005).

Thus, workplace spirituality could bring transformation in techies by broadening their perspective through higher purpose, meaningfulness in the work, interconnectedness and mindfulness.

*Meaningfulness in work:* Meaningfulness refers to 'making sense' of what individuals are doing (Bailey et al., 2017). Kahn (1990) defined meaningfulness as 'a feeling that a human being is receiving a return on investments in one's self in an exchange of physical, reasoning or emotional energy that arises from undertaking work that is valuable, beneficial' (p. 704). Further, meaningful work is also defined as work that is subjectively meaningful, significant, rewarding or aligned with individual values (e.g. Montani et al., 2017; Nair & Vohra, 2010; Renard & Snelgar, 2016). Employees in the organisation emphasises on making sense of the work they do. As an integral element of spirituality, meaningful work creates a joy that connects employees to work for the larger good (Duchon & Plowman, 2005). Extant literature has reported that positive workplace relationships are significant for meaningful work (e.g. Bailey & Madden, 2016; Chen et al., 2011; Isaksen, 2000). Meaningful work increases performance, motivation, commitment and satisfaction (Bailey & Madden, 2016). The psychiatrist Viktor Frankl famously describes 'how human beings in any calamitous circumstance or events could survive if they have meaning in life. Thus, the significance of meaningful work in the professional life of techies should not be underestimated. Therefore, we propose that if the techies are provided with meaningful work, it would not only result in positive work outcomes like satisfaction and working creatively but also in 'joy at work', ultimately enhancing the well-being of techies and motivating them to work for larger good for society by designing a product that is eco-friendly technology.

## **Higher Purpose**

Workplace spirituality could facilitate the techies for actualising their higher purpose. An organisation that emphasises creating strong cultural values through higher purpose through strong spiritual leadership could excel in serving the business and environment by producing a product that profits not only the organisation but also the environment. A higher purpose in spiritual leaders provides a motivating force for working towards organisations as well as society (Klaus & Fernando, 2016). A spiritual person transcends their narrow self to contribute towards society's higher purpose (Parameshwar, 2005). Techies would

work more sense fully when they have a higher purpose to work towards the betterment of society. The spiritual base value would benefit teamwork and employee commitment (Neck & Milliman, 1994). Organisations that offer a higher purpose and empowerment can invigorate their employees and concurrently meet the organisation's monetary objectives as well as a higher community purpose (Neck & Milliman, 1994). Further, the organisation's values should also support offering techies a sense of purpose to enhance their sustainable workplace behaviour. When the organisations and employee's higher purpose are aligned, they have the potential to bring change for the higher good of the company and society. We propose that if techies have a higher purpose, it could drive their action to create such technology that could benefit humankind and nature and business.

## **Interconnectedness**

Interconnectedness plays a vital role in workplace spirituality (Mitroff & Denton, 1999). Interconnectedness is described as having a deep connection to or relationship with others (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). This perspective among employees could develop belongingness and loyalty to the work and organisation (Karakas, 2010). The extant literature reports that employees who have a strong sense of interconnectedness experience joy and satisfaction by helping others (Khari & Sinha, 2017; Wasko & Faraj, 2000).

Spirituality brings the realisation that human beings are connected to each other. The interconnected dimension could be related to many underlying philosophies, for example, UBUNTU. The philosophy of 'Ubuntu', which is an Nguni word term from African culture, means 'I AM BECAUSE WE ARE'; it addresses our interconnectedness and responsibility towards each other that flow from our connections (Nussbaum, 2003). Ubuntu emphasises personhood through community, that is, it is in regard to the community the person is defined (Nussbaum, 2003).

Further, interconnectedness could be understood through the eastern spiritual perspective through Loksangrah, the social message stated in Bhagavad Gita illustrates the significance of welfare of all living beings that could facilitate the dimension of interconnectedness. Loksangrah refers to the unanimity of the world and the interconnectedness of society (Radhakrishnan, 1970, p. 139; Pardasani et al., 2014). 'Loksangrah' is composed of two words; 'Lok' and 'Sangrah'; 'lok' refers to the world, and 'Sangrah' means holding together (Pardasani et al., 2014). A society depends on the interdependence of its constituents, including individuals, to function properly. Pardasani et al. (2014) call for the need to address sustainability concerns through spirituality. This could be addressed by encouraging the awareness of selfless service and concern for welfare among employees (Pardasani et al., 2014) and society. Spirituality has the potential for a paradigm shift of techies, making them aware of interconnectedness; that is how we all are connected with others, society and the environment. Thus, inculcating spirituality through training programmes among techies is the need of the hour.

## **Mindfulness**

There has been a significant increase in mindfulness training in organisations. The extant literature reported a positive relationship between mindfulness with organisational productivity, creativity and employee well-being (Sajjad & Shahbaz, 2020; Wolever et al., 2018; Zivnuska et al., 2016). Wamsler et al. (2018) claimed 'Mindfulness' could improve understanding and facilitate sustainability that includes all levels, individual level, local, national and global, and should, thus, become a core concept in sustainability science, practice and teaching. Mindfulness has been defined as 'being attentive and in the present' (Brown & Ryan, 2003). According to Lynn et al. (2017), 'Mindfulness' comprises meditative mindfulness and socio-cognitive mindfulness. Meditative mindfulness, introduced by Kabat-Zinn et al. (1985), describes mindfulness as a technique that emphasises improving psychological and physical health. Kabat-Zinn asserts that mindfulness comprises two aspects, first is being aware of the present in regard to emotions and cognition. The second is to be non-judgemental towards the experiences. Kabat-Zinn claimed that the non-judgemental facet of mindfulness lessens emotional reactivity and develops tolerance that might lead to improving the physical and psychological well-being of the person (Brown et al., 2007; Lutz et al., 2013). At the same time, socio-cognitive mindfulness is a state of being aware, remaining sensitive to the context or perspective and being adaptive in any circumstances by remaining open to any new information (Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000; Trent et al., 2016).

Extant literature suggests positive linkages between mindfulness and sustainability. The extant literature studied the relationship between 'Mindfulness' and pro-environmental behaviour (Amel et al., 2009; Ericson et al., 2014; Panno et al., 2017; Pfattheicher et al., 2016; Sajjad & Shahbaz, 2020); feeling connected with the environment (Barbaro & Pickett, 2016) and environmental performance (Umar & Chunwe, 2019). Mindfulness enhances an individual ability to be flexible and learn new things, being creative and problem-solving techniques (Byrne & Thatchenkery, 2018; Colzato et al., 2012). Further, mindfulness enhances spiritual well-being through compassion for oneself and others (Beshai et al., 2016; Condon et al., 2013; Frank et al., 2015; Taylor et al., 2016; Tirsch, 2010). Mindfulness reduces negative emotions among individuals (Monzani et al., 2021). Despite the significance of mindfulness in the workplace, Wamsler et al. (2018) state the presence of theoretical, conceptual and empirical blind spots in the academic debate on mindfulness in sustainability research and practice. Therefore, there is scope for scholars to explore the mindfulness and its impact on sustainability through research. Also, organisations should support mindfulness techniques in the workplace to achieve sustainable behaviour among employees in practice.

Thus, we posit that if the techie's mind is cultivated through mindfulness training would benefit their well-being, making them more compassionate with themselves and others. Therefore, widening their horizons may result in a holistic understanding of promoting sustainable development.

## Conclusion

Workplace spirituality is very dynamic in nature (Rocha & Pinheiro, 2020). That is, the meaning of spirituality is unique for every individual and is evolving through time. Thus, spirituality should be practiced not by imposition but voluntarily in the workplace. Techies should be given spiritual training with the motive to nourish their inner development and enhance their well-being. The developed inner self of techies would transform them, making them mindful of the interconnectedness that exists between them and organisations, nature, others and society.

Further, spirituality would bring about a paradigm shift among techies leading towards the greater good of society, nature and company's higher purpose that would benefit everyone. We posit that being spiritual at the workplace would help techies change their mindset through higher purpose, interconnectedness, mindfulness and meaningfulness in their work. Thus, spirituality at the workplace will not only help techies to bring sustainability but also enhance their well-being. Further, spirituality at work will also have a positive spillover effect on their personal life.

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