Spiritual quotient towards organizational sustainability: the Islamic perspective

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore the impact of spiritual quotient (SQ) on the organisational sustainability from the Islamic perspective. Till date, many organisations around the world are facing environmental, social and economic issues affecting their organisational sustainability.

Design/methodology/approach – The present paper is conceptual paper based on literature review on employee's behavioural issues and role of SQ for organisational sustainability.

Findings – This present paper argues that SQ must be considered as the important factor for employee development in the organisation. It develops spiritual awareness among employees which enhances their productivity within the organisation. Furthermore, SQ is necessary means of identifying and harnessing deeper inner resources with the capacity to care for the well-being of the organisation and advance its development.

Research limitations/implications – The paper suggests SQ and its multi-dimensions with the implication for future research in organisational sustainability.

Originality/value – The paper discusses the development of the concept of SQ from the Islamic perspective.

Keywords Islamic culture, Employee behaviour, Organizational sustainability, Spiritual quotient

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction

The past decade has witnessed several large unethical scandals in global organisations, perhaps best exemplified by the global financial crisis, which has underscored the importance of organisational sustainability (Soltani, 2014). Since 2000, a number of large organisations have been in the news due to unethical scandals (Carroll and Buchholtz, 2014). In business organisations, sustainability is referred to as the "triple bottom line" comprising environmental, social/ethical and economic well-being (Willard, 2012). The triple bottom line has become the leading paradigm of organisational sustainability. The term was coined in 1997 by John Elkington (2004) in his book entitled *Cannibals with Forks: The Triple Bottom Line of Twenty-first Century Business Organisations*. The book argued that unethical issues typically occur because of conflicts between an employee's personal moral beliefs and values and the core values of the organisational culture. Conflict usually starts when employees attempt to fulfil their own goals instead of those of the organisation (Ferrell and Fraedrich, 2015). According to the Ethics Resource Centre's (2012) "National Business Ethics of Fortune 500 Employees", in 2012, 52 per cent of employees were involved in unethical misconduct. The range of illegal and unethical activities that go unreported is extensive and include bribery and fraud. Such behaviour by employees damages the organisational sustainability and its reputation (Lu and Lin, 2014).

Organisational sustainability issues

Organisational sustainability is an emerging discipline. The debate regarding the indicators and measures of sustainability is continued in literature (Özlem and Besler, 2014). To date, many

organisations are facing new changes and challenges concerning their sustainability (Adams and Frost, 2008). Organisational sustainability is considered to be a three-dimensional concept that focusses on environmental, economic and social issues in the organisation (Schaltegger and Burritt, 2010). The increasing importance of organisational sustainability can be accessed from the fact that social, environmental and economic issues in an organisation are growing reasons for the employee's unethical scandals (Willard, 2012). Many organisations regard organisational sustainability as being limited to purely "economic" indicators, social issues and the internal environment (Petrini and Pozzebon, 2009). However, the question arises as to how these three dimensions can be sustained. In addition, business is concerned about fraud and unethical behaviour in the organisation (Garavan and McGuire, 2010). Therefore, a growing number of organisations have engaged in serious efforts to integrate organisational sustainability into their business practices.

During the last decade, a notable number of major global companies failed due to unethical practices. For instance, the Enron Corporation, WorldCom, Arthur & Anderson collapsed. These organisations suffered from low efficiency, revenue losses and bankruptcy, which adversely affected the economic sustainability (Schwartz, 2013; Stevens, 2013). The principle case for the failure of these organisations was the extreme lack of ethics (Soltani, 2014). Thus, it can be argued that the ethical lapse of a single employee may result in financial and moral damage to the entire organisation. Although most big organisations have formal code of ethics and offer ethical training to their employee, these programs have proven to be ineffective with many ethical breaches remaining widespread in organisations (Ferrell and Fraedrich, 2015). Such a predicament is a grave concern for organisational sustainability. The role of employee in the success and sustainability of organisation is becoming more strategic and much crucial and receiving great interest in the business management literature (Ahmed *et al.*, 2016a). For instance, employees of the telecommunications company Global Crossing were involved in dishonest and fraudulent behaviour (Schwartz *et al.*, 2005). A person's self-interest can lead to unethical behaviour as evidenced by literature on the collapse of Enron Corporation, Tyco International Company and WorldCom (Stevens, 2013). At the heart of these scandals was employee unethical behaviour. As such, there is room for serious revision of existing organisational culture and current ethical code of conduct. It is within this context that this research examines spiritual quotient (SQ) and Islamic culture in the organisation as a potential solution to these problems.

Employee behaviour in the organisation

Many organisations are highly concerned about employee behaviour for a number of reasons. Poor employee behaviour decreases organisational performance, financial losses, reputational damage, is a safety concern and causes loss of customers (Askew *et al.*, 2015). Unethical behaviour in the organisation is defined as behaviour in and by organisations that violates generally accepted moral norms of behaviour (Jones, 1991). Unethical behaviour may be defined as behaviour that violates generally accepted moral norms which may impact an entity's costs, stakeholders and the society in general. Kaptein (2011) argued that the literature on predictor variables of unethical behaviour within work settings has not received considerable research attention. There are growing cases of employees experiencing situations where peers and supervisors encourage unethical behaviour. For instance, unethical behaviour may be an employee turning a blind eye to wrongdoing, failure to report wrongdoings or directly engaging in unethical activity (Xu *et al.*, 2016). Employee's unethical behaviour is shown in Figure 1.

To understand unethical behaviour in the organisation, scholars initially focussed on the personal characteristics of individual transgressors, the so-called "bad apples approach". The focus has shifted to the characteristics of the organisational context within which unethical behaviour occurs, the so-called "bad barrels approach" (Greenberg, 2002). This study
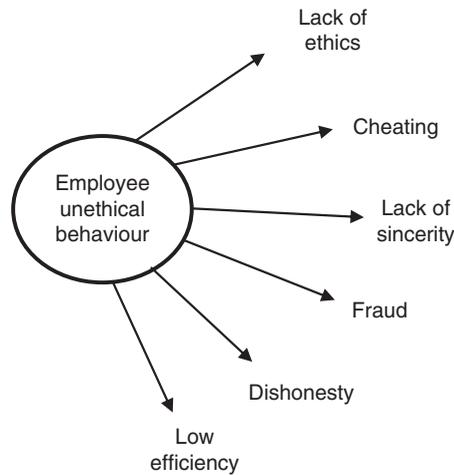
Source: Akhtar *et al.* (2017)

Figure 1.
Employee behaviour

addresses these relationships by investigating a specific contribution of employee ethical behaviour towards organisational sustainability, i.e. employees can perform ethically and give high performance through SQ training with the influence of Islamic culture within the organisation (Ahmed *et al.*, 2016b).

Spiritual employees who work for organisations are assumed to be more honest and ethical (Akhtar *et al.*, 2015). Scholars have linked employee behaviour with SQ. Vaughan (2002) reported that spiritual maturity is expressed through a person's wisdom and compassionate deeds that contribute to the holistic development of human beings. Others provide compelling correlations between spirituality and good business (Brophy, 2015), and it has gained the interest of both scholars and practitioners. In addition, Roof (2015) confirmed that the incorporation of spirituality at work increases employees' well-being by increasing their morale, commitment, and productivity; and decreases employees' stress, burnout in the organisation.

In the twenty-first century, the researcher has focussed on employee spirituality in the workplace (Dhiman, 2017). Academics have begun investigating spirituality in business organisations. Despite the attention of previous studies on spirituality, the growing body of literature on workplace spirituality has offered several insights, but it also has been criticised for lacking rigour or critical thinking (Milliman *et al.*, 2003). The dimension of workplace spirituality represents how employees interact with their day-to-day work at the individual level. The expression of spirituality at work involves the assumptions that each person has his/her own inner motivations and truths and desires to be involved in activities that give greater meaning to his/her life and the lives of others (Ashmos and Duchon, 2000).

Linking SQ and Islamic culture

Zohar and Marshall (2000) introduced SQ which allows people to see the larger context in which actions take place, and it gives to people's lives an overarching canopy of meaning and value. Wigglesworth (2006) defined SQ as the ability to behave with wisdom and clemency as long as internal and external peace is maintained. SQ is the key to life-long self-control, putting the person in charge of how they think and behave (Manghrani, 2011). SQ engages in virtuous behaviour: to show forgiveness, to display compassion and wisdom. Furthermore, virtuous behaviour implies human strength that enables the employee to work ethically in

their organisation (Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003). According to Reave (2005), spiritual values and practices allow people to accomplish organisational goals such as increased productivity, lowered rates of turnover and organisational sustainability. Vasconcelos (2011) indicated that organisations that have accepted a spiritual framework might have realised that it contributes to a healthy work environment. SQ is important to assist an individual in realising the deepest and most internal resource from which the capacity to care, the power to tolerate and adapt is obtained (George, 2006). Also, SQ helps employees in their dealings and aligns personal values with a clear sense of purpose that demonstrates a high level of integrity in the organisation (Chin *et al.*, 2011).

People perceive spiritual growth as an important part of their life, as it can affect not only their personality growth but also their professional life (Jawahar, 2012). In this regard, SQ in employees improves their honesty and trust (Petchsawang and Duchon, 2012). Emmons (2000) argued that SQ protects people from non-desirable and non-adaptive behaviours like acting in destructive ways, socially or even personally. SQ in organisations can enhance employee training by promoting moral intelligence, giving us an innate ability to distinguish right from wrong. It is the intelligence with which we exercise goodness, truth, beauty, and compassion in our lives. It is the soul's intelligence, if you think of the soul as that channelling capacity in human beings that brings things up from the deeper and richer dimensions of imagination and spirit into our daily lives, families, organisations and institutions (Zohar and Marshall, 2004).

Today, many organisations emphasise on SQ training programs. Power Grid Corporation of India Limited (POWERGRID) provides SQ training programs to their employee to improve their behaviour performance (Jawahar, 2012). It is becoming a more common feature in organisations and is being developed along religious lines. From the Islamic viewpoint, spiritual teaching and human spiritual development are well established. Imam Al-Ghazali indicated that man's spiritual aspects not be understood as "spirit" and "heart" (Wilkinson, 2014). Furthermore, religion has a close connection with SQ. In the Islamic context, SQ has attracted considerable attention. Some factors that influence SQ in Islamic texts is faith in God, virtue and righteousness in daily exercises, such as contemplation in the creation, reflection and probing, fasting, worship, reading and honest reflection in the Qur'an (Haj, 2002). The complete picture of employee behaviour and organisational sustainability is shown in Figure 2.

SQ and Islamic culture as a solution for organisational sustainability
SQ is the ultimate intelligence with which we can assess a course of action or life path as more meaningful than another (Marshall, 2002). Furthermore, high SQ requires us to be
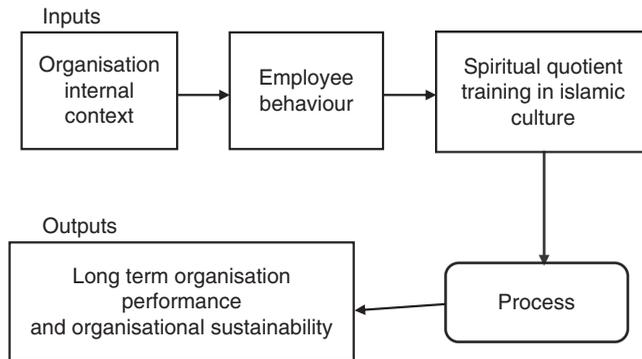
Source: Akhtar *et al.* (2017)

honest with ourselves and demands the most intense personal integrity (Selman *et al.*, 2011). Amram (2007) argues that SQ is the set of abilities that employees use to apply, manifest and embody spiritual resources, values and qualities in ways that enhance their daily functioning and well-being. According to Chin *et al.* (2011), the prevalence of SQ in an organisation can help in identifying and aligning the personal values of the employee with a clear sense of purpose. Furthermore, employees would be able to demonstrate a high level of integrity. Rahman and Shah (2015) indicated that SQ has a positive relation with Islam. In Islam, SQ guides human beings to live their life meaningfully. Further, SQ is about self-control, spiritual maturity, the consciousness of God and a close relationship with God which controls their inner thoughts and generates positive human actions and behaviour (Badri, 2000). Abdullah (2011) pointed out that soul purification is a prerequisite for closeness to God. Furthermore, according to Al-Ghazali (1983), knowledge of God purifies the human soul and removes destructive qualities and actions.

Conclusion and future research

This conceptual paper discusses the role of SQ and Islamic culture, and how employee behaviour issues that adversely affect organisational sustainability can be resolved. Employees are considered the most valuable asset to their organisation (Sarangi and Srivastava, 2012). This resource is under threat as employees confront behavioural problems due to a lack of spirituality which can be detrimental to organisational sustainability (Weber and Wasieleski, 2013). The premise of the current paper is that nurturing the Islamic culture and promoting SQ among the employees of the organisation will help to achieve organisational sustainability.

The paper proposed that self-purification, self-control, discipline and order, spiritual puberty are resources and mechanisms of making SQ are the consign components of moral virtue and should be transferred to balancing human character and proper interpersonal relations. It emphasises the importance of the development of the spiritual aspect of a person's work morality to improve the capacity of human resources that, in turn, stresses on general cooperation. The understanding of spirituality as a kind of intelligence develops the psychological concept of spirituality and relates it to the cognitive and reason process such as achieving goals and solving problems.

The propositions explained in this conceptual paper provide insight into the ethical issues currently plaguing organisations. It concludes that employees can develop their perceptions regarding the ethical work climate based on their organisation's policies and practices regarding ethics (Cullen *et al.*, 2003). In Islam, SQ guides the man to live their life meaningfully. Further, SQ is about self-control, spiritual maturity, consciousness of God and a close relationship with God which control inner thoughts and generates positive human actions and behaviour (Badri, 2000). Thus, employees' unethical behaviour in an organisation can be solved through SQ and Islamic culture in the organisation and it will contribute to organisational sustainability. Future research could address that how SQ maximise the social and economic performance. Such initiatives would be helpful tool in future for organisational sustainability. Moreover, researcher can extend the knowledge while testing the above proposed concepts.

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