

Role Of Creativity And Spirituality In The Workplace: Insights For Business Leaders

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Abstract

In the present world, leaders are expected to nurture an environment of collaborative creativity and innovation for bringing transformation in the lives of the people. Creativity can be enhanced through spirituality as both have common values like curiosity, openness to experience, serendipity, patience, flow and happiness, humility, etc. The paper discusses their role and relevance in the context of positive leadership and illuminates the role of subtle mind in context of creativity and spirituality.

Introduction

In the present era of ferocious and fast change (Kotter, 2012), changing paradigms (Barker, 1992), ever expanding aspirations of customers, greater pressure on sustainability (UN, 2019) due to depleting resources, - leaders are expected to nurture an environment of collaborative creativity and innovation for bringing transformation in the lives of the people. Creativity has been named as the single most important attribute of success in leading large corporations to success (IBM Survey, 2010). To stay competitive, leaders must cultivate motivation for creativity by fostering an environment of workplace engagement and encouragement. 3M and Google allow its people 15 to 20% exploration time for innovation and creativity. Presently organizations are practicing spirituality at workplace to contribute to human flourishing and happiness at workplace (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000) that can also be harnessed to foster creativity. Do creativity and spirituality have common values that contribute to transformation and positive leadership? The present paper attempts to explore common values of creativity and spirituality based upon the review of qualitative statements of various creative scientists and literary persons, to discuss its relevance in the context of positive leadership and to illuminate the role of subtle mind in context of creativity.

Meaning of Creativity

Writers and researchers tend to be so creative in defining creativity that there is hardly a commonly agreed upon definition of creativity. Different experts describe it as 'fluency, flexibility and originality, sensitivity to problems' (Guilford, 1962, p. 380), making new connections, "any act, idea or product that changes an existing domain or that transforms an existing domain into a new idea" (Crikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 28), etc. To Amabile (1998) "In business, originality isn't enough. To be creative, an idea must be appropriate-useful and actionable." This view is in line with the conclusion drawn from the scientific research into creativity: an idea is creative to the extent that it is "simultaneously original [with very low probability of occurrence], useful [adaptive, functional, meaningful or appropriate] and surprising [not with a straightforward application of any domain specific expertise]" (Simonton, 2018, pp. 149-150). In context of business, creativity is identified as "problem solving strategy" (Zhou & George, 2001) with "originality and usefulness as the two important characteristics" (Mayer, 1999). Likewise, innovation is

the process of generation, acceptance and implementation of new ideas, processes, or services. (Kanter, 1983). If creativity is about discovering something novel and useful, innovation is successful implementing it and bringing it to fruition.

Spirituality and Work place spirituality

Though spirituality lacks universal definition because of its association with mysticism yet this all inclusive phenomena has been indicated differently. Unlike formal and structured religions, spirituality is beyond dogmatized belief system and organized cult. Spirituality is described as sacredness, feeling of the whole existence, presence of the transcendental power of the timeless universal spirit caring of every being, and interconnectedness of different beings: “the basic feeling of being connected with one’s complete self, others, and the entire universe.”(Mitroff & Denton,1999, p. 83). This is manifested in the transformed behavior of inner peace and poise, hope, kindness, unconditional love, optimism, and searching for the meaning of life. Though individuals look like discrete entities as body-mind mechanisms, yet universal consciousness permeates all, and everything is interconnected. Karakas (2010) defines it as the journey to search and understand “the existential self and its relationship/interconnectedness with the sacred and transcendent” (p. 91) in authentic, holistic and meaningful way. Spirituality is not only individual, but also group phenomenon, as well as not only inner but also outer phenomenon manifested as care and help for the unfortunates. Spirituality at workplace not only takes care of economic and interpersonal aspect, but also enables the individual to get meaning, realize one’s potentials, and “salvation via hard work and total commitment to doing well” (Maslow, 1998. p. 8). In context of organization, “spirituality is a framework of organizational values that promotes employees’ experience of transcendence through the work process, facilitating their sense of being connected in a way that provides feelings of compassion and joy.” (Giacalone & Jurkiwicz, 2003, p. 13).

In ever increasing volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) environment like we experienced in COVID pandemic, leaders need to demonstrate compassion flowing out of deep rooted spirituality as well as creativity to generate shared and sustainable future. Creativity and spirituality can complement each other due to intense mental and emotional involvement with awakening, transcendence, love and care, patience and humility, etc.

Role of Spirituality in Generation of Creativity

Does spirituality contribute to generation of creativity? There is no empirical inquiry specifically addressing this question because the element of personal bias interference. Many creative geniuses have been highly spiritual and just as many have been staunch materialists. “Whether a mystic poet is more creative than a materialistic scientist is questionable. How would one even make that judgment without exhibiting personal bias?”(Simonton, 2017).

However there are certain explanations regarding the role of spirituality in creativity as “spirituality can certainly influence the content of a person’s creativity.” (Simonton, 2017) Quantum scientists Bohr, Heisenberg and Schrödinger regularly read Vedic texts of Indian spirituality and consequently their ideas did not look alien to spiritualists. To Einstein(1954), “ the cosmic religious feeling is the strongest and noblest motive for scientific research.” Indian mathematician Ramanujan credited his brilliance to his family goddess, Mahalakshmi and looked to her for inspiration. To him ‘an equation has no meaning, unless it represents a thought of God’ (Kalam & Tiwari, 2015, p 152). Ramanujan has been called “magical genius” more than “ordinary genius”, who comes up with ideas that his colleagues could not conceive and is “100 times smarter. His theorems and conjectures would let others say that they have no idea where those results came from (Kolata, 1987, p. 1519). Similarly the life of Gregor Mendel demonstrates that a devout spiritual person can also contribute to scientific discovery. (Kalam & Tiwari, 2015, p. 139). The rare merger of spirituality and creativity is noticed in the life and works of Swami Shankaracharya.

Creativity and spirituality: Common Values in context of Leadership

Common themes in spirituality and creativity relevant in context of positive leadership-an umbrella term used for transformational, spiritual, ethical, authentic, servant and eupsychia leadership-as noticed from the qualitative statements and works of different scientists and literary persons are:

1. Curiosity

Practically every individual having novel contribution to a domain has been inspired by the feeling of awe about the mysteries of life. Without curiosity and deep interest, one is unlikely to preserve one's efforts and make a significant new contribution in creative way. When we look in the early or later on lives of various creative geniuses; they had tremendous interest and burning curiosity. Csikszentmihalyi (1996) observes, "Creative individuals are childlike in that their curiosity remains fresh even at ninety years of age; they delight in the strange and the unknown. And because there is no end to the unknown, their delight also is endless"(p. 346). Similarly spiritual people need intense curiosity called *Mamukshta* for liberation of the soul. Lord Buddha ventured out to search the existential questions of the cause of suffering and the ways to eradicate them. Therefore Einstein (1955) profoundly advises to preserve holy curiosity both for spiritual as well as creative pursuit: "Curiosity has its own reason for existence...It is enough if one tries merely to comprehend a little of this mystery [of eternity] each day. Never lose a holy curiosity." (p. 64)

Curiosity of different people at all levels helps the organization to adapt according to uncertainties in external environment with creative solutions, and enables leaders to command more respect along with more trusting and collaborative relationship (Gino, 2018). It instills passion and purpose among different people and facilitates their engagement in smooth and harmonious way. Moreover curiosity leads to capturing tacit and explicit knowledge, facilitates learning and transforms organization as learning organization(Senge,1990). Though learning organization involves team learning with shared vision as creativity occurs in "interaction between a person's thoughts and a sociocultural context" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 23) yet individual curiosity plays dominating role in provocation of ideas through dialogues.

2. Serendipity and rare chance

The concept of serendipity is referred as happy accident, unexpected outcome by chance during the pursuit of something else. This phenomena in Archemdies' moments of "Eureka" (I have found it) rarely occurs in the mind of creative persons. How Charles Darwin describes those moments, "I can remember the very spot in the road, whilst in my carriage, when to my joy the solution occurred to me." (Barlow, 1958, p. 120-121). Henri Poincare (1921) recalls, "ideas rose in crowds, I felt them collide until pairs underlocked" (p. 387) making different combinations in blind and unexpected way, formed of elements drawn from different domains which are far apart, "some entirely sterile but among them very rare are the most fruitful of all." (p. 386). French Mathematician Hadamard (1945) further illuminates about chance factor occurring in the mind of the creative scientist, "the intervention of chance occurs inside the unconscious: for most of these combinations-more exactly.....remain unknown to us." (p. 30). However for chance factors to occur, creative genius have to work hard as "chance favours only the prepared mind" (Pasteur, 1854). Edison looked at creativity as simply good, honest hard work precedent to sudden illumination because genius is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration. Simonton (1999) opines that creative scientists have to generate greater number of thoughts in their mind as creativity follows Darwin theory with 5% retention of creative ideas. Spirituals have to undergo hardships and sufferings before getting sudden illumination as illustrated in the story of Sidharatha by Hermann Hesse (1922).

Leaders may have to take decisions in the sudden moments especially in situation of crisis where serendipity works as they best utilize their intuitions instead of relying on too much analysis that leads to paralysis. This power of thinking without thinking in "blink" moments-when someone knows something without knowing why (Gladwell, 2006) helps them to save time by overlooking the details. For capturing the creative insight of the teammates, leaders listen them by remaining in present moment.

3. Openness to experience

Openness to experience enables creative genius to perceive reality from different perspectives instead of looking in stereotyped way and to integrate different unusual ideas of different domains. What a Copernicus or Darwin really achieved was not the discovery of new theory, but a fertile new point of view. Leonardo da Vinci forced a relationship between the sound of a bell and a stone hitting water which enabled him to make the connection that sound travels in waves. French mathematician Jacques Hadamard(1945), who proved the prime number theorem, argued that invention, including mathematical invention, requires the discovery of unusual but fruitful combinations of ideas. Albert Rothenberg (1986) argues that if opposite ideas are held together by suspending thought, then mind moves to new level of intelligence to act and create new forms.

Similarly spirituality involves unconditioning the mind, self-awareness from moment to moment and readiness to learn from others' experiences. Spiritualists celebrate personal differences by regarding diversities as different manifestations of the underlying Unity that permeates every phenomenon. We find Ramakrishna Paramhansa (1836-1886) undergoing many faiths like Tantra, Vedanta, etc because of his acceptance and respect for other faiths.

Leader's openness to experience helps to manage talent, celebrate diversity in organizations (Dhiman et al, 2019), harness experiences and ideas of different people of different backgrounds through dialogues with shared meaning, and demonstrate genuine love and concern for them. This facilitates engagement of different members viewing diversity as opportunity to excel (Zohar & Marshall, 2004, p. 95) and to exercise opposable mind that holds two conflicting ideas in creative tension by applying integrative thinking-the capacity to hold two diametrically opposite ideas (Martin, 2007, p. 6). Based upon the stories of leaders of diversified corporations like A.G. Lafley of Procter & Gamble and Bob Young of Red Hat Software, Martin demonstrates that brilliant leaders skillfully use integrative thinking to synthesize the opposites and to draw best of them.

4. Focus

Creative persons protect their focus to immerse in creative process. More challenging tasks require greater focus with deep and meditative thinking for profound reflections that allow unconscious mind to establish synaptic connections among different thoughts. Donald Campbell talks about mental meandering by keeping external distractions away to avoid cutting down exploratory ideas and intellectually exploratory time(Csikzenmihayi, 1996, p. 99). Thoughts lacking conscious direction often tend to follow simple law of association either with relevant or irrelevant context.

Mindful meditation attempts to bring back the mind to present state with profound focus, from dwelling on past or projections of future to present state of moment to moment awareness (Ricard, 2008, pp. 99-107). Like creative persons 'being passionate about their work, yet very objective' (Csikzenmihayi, 1996, p. 120), spiritualists meditate with great involvement but witness themselves in detached manner.

Steve Job told Walter Isaacson(2012), "Deciding what not to do is as important as deciding what to do..." Therefore he reduced making 40 models computers by Apple to four and focused on core products after rejoining Apple in 1997. Jobs' personality with focus was honed by his serious search for enlightenment in India and Zen training (Isaacson, 2012/2011). He was very strict and ruthless in filtering out distractions and simplifying things on their essence by eliminating unnecessary components. This simplifying as the ultimate sophistication, is not ignoring but conquering complexity (Isaacson, 2012). In the present era of plenty of information with poverty of attention, leaders need to leverage triple focus- "hidden driver of excellence" (Goleman, 2013): on oneself, people and surrounding environment for their task of "effectively capturing and directing the collection attention" (p. 210).

5. Spirit of loving, caring and sacrifice

Creativity requires love for the craft with mixture of intellect and intuition defused together. While writing a poem or novel, the writer needs to enjoy the phenomenon, stretch their meaning, string them in novel combinations and polish them till shine(Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 239). Creative persons overlook the deficiencies of physical comforts for the sheer love of their creations as they uphold pursuit of their journey as reward in itself. Hungarian poet Faludy's sensibility and spirit remained unaffected despite his imprisonment and torture by Nazis for two years and by Russian

Communists for five years. To Faludy, “Suffering is not bad: It helps you very much....We are a perverse race, only sufferings interest us.” (Csikszentmihalyi (1996, p. 84).

Spiritualists have to undergo voluntary sufferings and sacrifices for the welfare of the humanity at large. To them, “Where sacrifice is not willingly given, Nature exacts it by force, she satisfies the law of her living,” Sri Aurobindo (2009, p. 54-55). The Upanishads hold that the greatest sacrifice is unconditional and selfless devotion to the Lord and unselfish service to the humanity at large which can be performed by practising virtues of veracity, justice, benevolence, etc. (Radhakrishnan, 1914). Bhagvad Gita illuminates Yajana (4.10-16, 4.24-35) as means for purification and ways towards attainment of the highest truth.

Leaders care and love their constituents to lead them in right direction. Their kindness, love and caring attitude help to create soothing environment of mutual respect and trust, and engage people in effective way. They have to be empathic (Yukl, 1998, p. 99) and caring (Spears, 2010) which involves moral authority and voluntary sacrifices that we find in the moral leaders like Lord Buddha, Mahavira, Gandhi, Martin Luther, Nelson Mandela, etc.

6. Patience

Creative scientists and poets have to observe the events and phenomenon patiently unfolding with new meaning that may alternate between “passionate involvement and sardonic detachment.” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 243) and to avoid superficial findings in quick reactions. George Sylvester Viereck (1929) describes Einstein’s “infinite patience” as he never resented questions but loved to explain the complex problems to even ten year old son of his friend. To Hans Bethe, Noble laureate in Physics, two things are required for creative ideas to emerge: brain and “willingness to spend long times in thinking, with a definite possibility that you come out with nothing.” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 61).

Spiritualists need great patience as they meditate continuously with blink possibility of illumination, but with persistent efforts. This patience acts as antidote to ego and helps to perpetuate one’s pursuit for cherished goal. Without it, one becomes a bull in china shop, blithely destroying future happiness [as well as chances of illumination].” (Kalam & Tiwari, 2015, p. 17). To spiritualist meditation is reaction-free-consciousness or equanimity attained through patience and forgiveness.

Dalai Lama and Muiyzenberg (2008) advocate patience as one of perfections that a leader should possess as trait that has a definite ability to affect others in effective way especially in provocative circumstances, hostility, criticism and disappointment (p. 37). If the leader has cultivated profound peaceful state of mind with patience, s/he is more likely to respond with “calm, collected and concentrated mind” (Dalai Lama & Muiyzenberg, 2008, p. 99) undisturbed by negative emotions and reactive behavior. The opposite of such state of mind lacking patience is least effective and hyper-reactive mind as witnessed in abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000) with fits of anger thrown at subordinates destroying the peace of organization. Leaders’ patience helps to retain resilience-the ability to recover from setbacks.

7. Flow and Happiness

Creativity leads to transcendence-experience beyond limits of mind to larger perspective of accepting something greater than self in mysterious way (Horan, 2009), peak experiences-moments of intense joy and happiness (Maslow, 1998) and flow -a state of full engagement in highly challenging task with high skills (Criszentmihayai, 1990). Creative persons experience flow-as they find clarity of goals, know how to do well, balance challenges with skills, synchronize awareness with action, keep distractions away, forget self and surrounding and feel autoletic experiences (Criszentmihayai, 1996)-that lead to happiness which is optimum state of human flourishing (Ricard, 2008). This relatively permanent state of mind is different from momentary and sensual pleasure[s] “that does not lead to creativity, but soon turns into addiction-the thrall of entropy.” (Csikzentmihayi, 1996, p 124).

Spiritualists train themselves to become minimally dependent upon external circumstances and situations. To them, sources of happiness are not confined to successful economic pursuits and feeling of emotional satisfaction, but finding the meaning in life with deep contentment and calm (Deci & Ryan, 2008) -a state of non-dependence upon external objects, persons and situation.

Transformational leadership attempts to ensure employees' wellbeing by facilitating them to find meaning at workplace through conducive environment, quality of relations, ethical functioning, trust and greater empowerment. Maslow's Eupsychian management (1998) creates conditions of work where people transcend their self through work. Eupsychia leaders being self-realised persons help others to realize their potentials (Rego et al, 2007, p. 66) by respecting their inner life, promoting positive interpersonal relations, treating them with respect and dignity, engaging and trusting them, and ensuring their peace of mind.

8. Humility

Humility is opposite of pride, arrogance, self-centeredness and egoist attitude. Humility is the cause and consequence of true learning and creativity, for nothing can go in a full vessel. Csizentmihalyi (1996) reports that creative persons he interviewed, appeared remarkably humble than arrogant or supercilious as they know the previous contributions to their field, are aware of the role luck in their achievements and are focused on their future projects with new challenges than feeling pride of their past achievements.

Humility has been appreciated in highest regard in spiritual texts of different religious traditions. According to Vedantic perspective as universal consciousness is flow through all beings, it is futile to view oneself as island in itself and pursue pride and ego. Taoist traditions believe in humility as all rivers flow to sea because it is lower. (Mitchell, 1988)

Humility is indeed the touchstone of great leadership. A tree with fruits bends. Without humility, service could be an inflation of ego that can lead to derailment and demise of leader. Research by Collins (2011) provides strong evidence of the usefulness of humility in leadership as he finds the great companies being led by Level 5 leadership- blend of humility and strong personal will. Nelson Mandela (1955), equates a great leader to a shepherd who "stays behind the flock, letting the most nimble go out ahead." (p. 22). Such leading from behind style, letting followers in the forefront of leadership line, requires great humility.

Common Thematic Values in different context

| Context→ Common Values ↓ | Creativity | Spirituality | Leadership |
|--------------------------------|--|--|---|
| 1. Curiosity | Feeling of awe | Witnessing inner world | Learning organization Capturing tacit and explicit knowledge |
| 2. Serendipity and rare chance | Unexpected outcomes | Insightfulness Sudden illumination | Making decision in crisis |
| 3. Openness to experience | Overcoming conditioned mind Suspending thoughts | Reflection on impermanence Acceptance | Diversity at workplace Talent management |
| 4. Focus | Meditative thinking Greater exploration | Calming turbulent mind Discrimination Detachment | Capturing and directing attention Simplification Dedication to work |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |
| 5. Spirit of loving, caring and sacrifice | Sacrifice Voluntary sufferings | Unconditional and selfless devotion Yajana: offering to Lord | Kindness, love & care Subordinating one's ego for higher cause |
| 6. Patience | Persistent efforts Passionate involvement with sardonic detachment | Reaction free consciousness | Tolerance Calm, collected and concentrated mind Empathy Control over negative emotions |
| 7. Flow and happiness | Transcendence Peak experiences Flow | Meaning of one's life Non-dependence upon externalities Ecstasy , | Happiness and meaning for others Conducive environment for self realisation |
| 8. Humility | Humbleness | Self-awareness | Level 5 leadership Prevents self-focus Leading from behind |

Role of sharp and subtle mind

Although in prior historical period, creative act has been regarded as “mysterious and even mystical process, more akin to divine inspiration than to mundane thought” (Simonton, 2000, p 152), grounded in ordinary mental processes (Boden, 1998), attempts have been made to integrate it with brain function (Pleninger & Shubik, 2001, p. 217) and neuroscience (Dietrich, 2004). David Bohm(1996) talks of Blackfoot mind a “repository of creativity because of the notion of constant flux...one does with the flow of the waves, becoming one with the waves..” (p. x) Likewise spiritualists particularly of Vedanta traditions talk about subtle mind which is more satvik in nature(Swami Tejomayananda, 2017) and captures the underlying essence that supports the visible work, and perceives the subtle phenomenon when the attention takes a particular form which is not the common one as it is hidden from ordinary sights. This mind is indicated as spiritual, meditative, clam, free flowing, adaptive and nimble mind. Our ordinary senses cannot grasp, yet we perceive it indirectly as Einstein quotes. “To sense that behind everything that can be experienced there is something that our minds cannot grasp, whose beauty and sublimity reaches us only indirectly: this is religiousness.” Presently realm of empirical world does not make any differentiation between sharp and subtle mind.

Subtle mind is focused in the realm of inner world and contributes to path breaking creativity. But to prove the results illuminated to subtle mind, we need sharp mind which is logical but constrained by boundaries. Sharp mind is outwardly directed, logical, scientific, focused, structured, but success-oriented mind. Take the case of Indian Mathematician Ramunuja, to whom mathematical formulas were revealed in height of spirituality as he stated his mystical intuitions, but its proof were presented by Professor Hardy (Simonton, 2016). E. Sreedharan(2019), well-known as Metro man of India holds that creativity functions when one thinks that one is not the owner of intelligence, does not take credit for the achievements and recognition but does the work to best of one's ability with offering to God and without getting attached to results.

Understanding the difference between sharp and subtle mind is critical to understanding the creative, moral and spiritual dimensions of leadership which is illuminated in following table:

| Sharp Mind | Subtle Mind |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Deals with analysis of facts | synthesis |
| Orderly and structured | Free-flowing and nimble |

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Spans boundaries | Revels in orbits |
| Hurried and worried | Calm and collected |
| Seeks pleasure and power | Contentment and peace |
| Impatient | Gracefully paced |
| Intense | authentic |
| Believes in control | Thrives in autonomy |
| Preplanning of operations | Spontaneous spirit of moments |
| Prepares scientists and engineers | Fashions seers and poets |
| Proud | Humble |

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