**Virtual Resources Center
in Social Work**

**Social
Research
Reports**

Volume 19

March 2011

Guest Editor: Maria Socorro Cristina L. Fernando, PhD**

**The editor obtained her PhD in Organization Development from the Southeast Asia Interdisciplinary Development Institute (SAIDI) –Graduate School of Organization Development, Philippines. She graduated from De la Salle University, Manila, Philippines with the degree of Master of Arts in Educational Management and obtained her Bachelor of Science in Zoology from the University of the Philippines. She presently works as Core Mentor, Director of the Applied Research Center, New Teacher Institute of SAIDI School of OD; and Director of the Formation Administration Unit at SAIDI Foundation, Inc. She is also an adjunct faculty at the Organization Communication Dept, De La Salle University, Manila and at the PhDMOD Program, Graduate School of Business at the Assumption University, Bangkok, Thailand. She conducts seminars and workshops in Appreciative Inquiry and is a member of the Editorial Advisory Board of Social Research Reports (www.researchreports.ro).   Contact   details: Southeast   Asia   Interdisciplinary Development   Institute-Graduate   School   of   Organization   Development (www.saidi.edu.ph). SAIDI Campus, Taktak Road, Brgy. Dela Paz, Antipolo City, Philippines 1870. email: mlfernando@gmail.com

Review of: Organizational Spirituality: Commitment, Awareness, Readiness and Engagement (C.A.R.E.) for Organization Development and Transformation: A Case Study of ABC co., Ltd

David Barrett ALDRIDGE

Published by:
Expert Projects Publishing House

On behalf of:
Virtual Resources Center in Social Work
www.asistentasociala.ro

Additional services and information about Social Research
Reports can be found at:
www.researchreports.ro

Review of: Organizational Spirituality: Commitment, Awareness, Readiness and Engagement (C.A.R.E.) for Organization Development and Transformation: A Case Study of ABC Co., Ltd

David Barrett ALDRIDGE[*], BS, CPA, MA

Abstract

Conducted in Thailand against a backdrop of unique Thai cultural influences and significant demographic, technological as well as political changes, the research and findings provided the peer reviewer with an understanding of organizational spirituality and its importance to a cohesive, high performing organization and also provided insights into the enabling elements of organizational spirituality that the reviewer believes are important for business leaders to understand before undergoing any type of organizational transformation. The reviewer finds this research to be relevant to businesses that are contemplating changes or where leaders which to have a deeper understanding and insight into their organizations.

Keywords: organizational spirituality; human resources; corporate social responsibility; participation; intervention.

Study background

The researcher's research subject is defined as ABC Co. Ltd., a Thai software development a professional services company that is headquartered in Bangkok and also has operations elsewhere in ASEAN. Demographically, the organization is young (approximately 60% of survey respondents – which are representative of the company's whole population – are in the 21 – 30 year old age range) well educated (approximately 99% hold bachelor's degrees and of that 99%, approximately 25% hold graduate, masters or PhD degrees) and Thai (97% are Thai Nationals and less than 2% are Western Expatriates). As a software and professional services company the

[*] Chief Operations Officer, Freewill Solutions Company Limited, 29th Floor, Lumpini Tower, 1168/86-88, Rama IV Road, Tungmahamek, Sathorn, Bangkok 10120; email: david_ald@freewillsolutions.com

company is all about people and their ability to formulate new ideas, innovations and deliver on them.

In an industry that is relatively new to Thailand (software development) the company has existed for nearly 20 years and as such can be regarded as one of the pioneer organizations in the field. During its 20 years in existence, however, according to the researcher, the company has faced a number of challenges, but has succeeded in addressing these challenges in a variety of ways. Not surprisingly, one of the main challenges faced by ABC Company is attracting, hiring and retaining qualified employees from a relatively limited candidate pool in Thailand. With qualified, capable and engaged people being the lifeblood of such an organization, this issue is critical. The research shows that the company had faced employee turnover rates as high as 30% in the past six years before the current management team came into place but has managed to reduce the employee turnover rate to be in line with the Thai IT industry which was about 15% at the time of the research.

The researcher also highlights some characteristics of Thai culture and how those characteristics translate into behaviors in the workplace both at the individual level and organizational level (Preudhikulpradab, 2011). Examples include:

-   Harmonious societies that value tact, compromise and tolerance;
-   Hierarchical societies where interactions (including communications, confrontations and exchanges of ideas) between two individuals are governed by where those individuals sit in the hierarchy and authority is derived from position;
-   Collectivist behavior where the desires or the good of a defined group may receive and be given priority to the desires or the good of an individual.

The researcher's comments on Thai culture echo findings from earlier research by Geert Hofstede dating back as early as the 1980s (Hofstede, 1980) and subsequent works which rated Thailand with a high "Power Distance Index" (PDI) of 60% and a relatively low "Individualisim" index (IDV) of about 15%; where the high PDI rating indicates "a high level of inequality of power and wealth within the society. This condition is not necessarily forced upon the population, but rather accepted by the society as a part of their cultural heritage" while the low IDV index indicates "the society is Collectivist as compared to Individualist. This is manifest in a close long-term commitment to the member 'group', is that a family, extended family, or extended relationships. Loyalty in a collectivist culture is paramount, and over-rides most other societal rules and regulations. The society fosters strong relationships where everyone takes responsibility for fellow members of their group" (http://www.geert-hofstede.com/hofstede_thailand.shtml). These characteristics, when manifesting themselves in the workplace may affect organizational behaviors, for example, in communication patterns, willingness to confront and reluctance to take a position contrary to a defined group and willingness to "stand out from the crowd".

Organization spirituality and its importance

The researcher defines organizational spirituality as "the total experience that provides individuals with direction and meaning in work life and activities they engage in while accomplishing, succeeding and excelling self, organization and community's goals that are firmly connected with their inner wholeness or sense of purpose; and support self and organizational values, vision mission and goals". Based on this research, the reviewer understands organization spirituality to be not only the relationship between the members of an organization and the organization itself but also the intrinsic attitudes and behaviors of those organization members and the extent to which they are aligned with the organization's goals, mission, values, etc. It's a complex relationship that combines traditional group or team ideas similar to spirit de corps with more contemporary ideas such as employee engagement though much more expansive. Really having nothing to do with organizational religiosity, it is the composite view of an organization's content (mission statements, strategy, work processes, HR practices – tangible things) and context (e.g., level of employee empowerment, communication patterns, culture of quality, innovative ability – intangible things) combined or matched with individual member's levels of commitment, awareness, readiness and engagement (CARE).

Based on the researcher's work, understanding an organization's spirituality level is more than understanding its morale or "feeling the pulse" of the organization, it is about understanding how well positioned the organization is to fulfill its expectations today (as defined by internal and external stakeholders) as well as how well the organization is positioned to adapt or transform itself to meet the future. Knowing this information (an organization's spirituality level) will give an organization's leadership and members deeper understanding about the organization's (and its members') abilities and attitudes in terms of commitment, awareness, readiness, and engagement.

In his study of ABC Company, the researcher uses the C.A.R.E. framework, a statistically significant employee survey and randomly selected interviews to measure the organizational spirituality level of various employee groups within ABC Co. (staff, managerial level and executive/ director level), identifies differences among these groups and finally recommends where interventions can be undertaken to ABC Co.'s content and context in order to improve organizational spirituality.

CARE levels at ABC Company Limited

Using carefully analyzed survey data and subsequent interview findings with 49 survey participants, the research identified differences in the levels of organizational spirituality at ABC Company among different groups of research participants, specifically, executive/ director level, managerial level and staff level.

The research results combined with the interview results provided the reviewer with an almost granular view of commitment, awareness, readiness and engagement levels

practiced at various levels of the organization and let the reviewer start to understand how certain Thai cultural characteristics (e.g., collectivism) influenced and enabled certain aspects of ABC Company's organizational spirituality, for example by fostering an almost "we're all in this together" attitude when faced with a challenging situation.

Based on the data analysis and interview findings, the research went on to identify a number of interventions that management and organization members of ABC Company could employ to enhance the levels of organizational spirituality practiced at all levels of the organization. These interventions include:

> Developing the company's core values and communicates them to all organization members in order to help foster an integrated culture and identity within the organization;
> Focusing more on human resources processes and practices (among the Human Resources function and as practiced by executives/ directors, management and to some extent staff) to ensure that they are in alignment with the organization's core values as well as aspirations of organization members;
> Simplifying the current organization structure for clarity and reduce ambiguity and overlaps; and
> Increase communications on organization scorecards and results as well as and where appropriate implement quality of work life programs.

The reviewer believes that, based on the data presented, these interventions and others embodied in the research could significantly enhance the practice of organization spirituality within ABC Company.

Future applicability of the CARE Organizational Spirituality model

In the book, "The 2020 Workplace: how innovative companies attract, develop and keep tomorrow's employees today" (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2010), authors Jeanne C. Meister and Karie Willyerd highlight 10 trends that will almost certainly (many already are) impact workplaces over the next 10 years including:

- Shifting workforce demographics – including aging workforces and shrinking birthrates in the developed world;
- The Knowledge economy – this includes the shift from "transactional" jobs to "tacit" jobs that require jobholders to possess complex skills sets such as: problem solving, judgment, listening, data analysis, relationship building, and collaborating and communication skills;
- Globalization – this is basically the redistribution or de-concentration of where work is performed from traditional places to basically anywhere on the globe that has an internet connection;

- The digital workplace – this is the explosive growth of digital content and the pervasiveness of personal digital devices that allow unfettered access to that content;
- The ubiquity of mobile technology – the mobile phone's role in the work place with grow from being primarily a communications device to include many other applications including, for example, mobile "just in time" learning devices;
- A culture of connectivity – this is the trend of always being "connected" to your friends and colleagues and blurring the line between work time and non work time;
- The participation society – this trend signals the increase in collaboration among business and their employees, customers and vendors;
- Social learning – this is the transition of corporate learning from being a traditional "top down" approach to an approach that is participatory, social, fun etc. while being integrated with work. It is learning that is, according to Meister and Willyerd, "collaborative, immediate, relevant and presented in the context of an individual's unique working environment";
- Corporate social responsibility – corporate philanthropy is becoming more business driven and integrated into the social, ethical and environmental agendas of organizations;
- Millennials in the workplace – Millennials are those born between 1997 and 2007 are digital natives who have grown up using technology everyday. Among other expectations, they will expect their employers to be as tech savvy as they are and to provide the tools and resources that they need.

The cumulative impact of these trends will be a workplace that is very different than the workplace of today, for example, in terms of: demographics (five generations in the workplace), job content and requisite knowledge and skills, modes of knowledge acquisition etc. The occurrence of these trends (and others not yet identified) will likely be asynchronous resulting in an unbalancing or destabilizing impact on organizations' spirituality.

The reviewer believes that the work performed and the model developed by the researcher will provide a solid foundation for creating an organizational spirituality assessment tool and conducting further research on how these trends (for example the knowledge economy, the digital workplace, the ubiquity of mobile technology and millennials in the workplace) will and are impacting organizations' spirituality and what practical interventions those organizations could take to strengthen their practices of organizational spirituality in the face of such disruptive changes.

References

Hofstede, G., 1980, Culture's consequences: international differences in work-related values, Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Meister, J. C., Willyerd, K., 2010, The 2020 Workplace: how innovative companies attract, develop and keep tomorrow's employees today, New York, NY: Harper Collins.

Preudhikulpradab, S. (2011). Organization Spirituality: Commitment, Awareness, Readiness And Engagement (C.A.R.E.) For Organization Development & Transformation: A Case Study Of ABC Co., Ltd.. *Social Research Report*, 19: 7-108.