The Explanation of Spiritual Intelligence and Burn Out Behavior of Information Technology Staffs

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Abstract

Employee burnout is a concern for most of the organizations today. It is critical for firms to understand how they can prevent employee burnout and provide a positive workplace to maintain their talents. On the other hand, spiritual intelligence as a new capability in perceiving the world is considered by managers recently as a way of maintaining employees' psychological healthiness. Regarding effects on the level of individual perception, this research is conducted to investigate the relationship between Spiritual Intelligence and Burn out of Information Technology staffs. Four dimensions of spiritual intelligence by King (2008), namely, aspects of critical existential thinking, personal meaning production, transcendental awareness, and conscious state expansion are being discussed in this study. Structural equation modeling analysis of survey data from a group of 130 information Technology personnel revealed that Spiritual Intelligence has a strong direct effect on Burn Out.

Keywords: Spiritual Intelligence; Burn out; Information Technology Staffs; Structural Equation Modelling.

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1. Introduction

Within the next decade, a considerable proportion of the current IT workers are expected to retire, and at the same time, fewer employees are entering this field [1]. The nature of the information technology profession associates with specific challenges for IT staffs. These challenges decrease employees’ willingness to continue their job, and consequently lead to more job abandonment. It is essential to conduct more research about ways of decreasing job burnout in IT field. Burn out as emotional exhaustion is described to be the result of “role overload, role conflict, interpersonal conflict, lack of autonomy, and lack of rewards as primary antecedents” [2] which lead to more task abandonment. Researchers have explained burnout as a kind of job strain which emerges from accumulated work-related stress [3]. The multidimensional model of Maslach is the most widely used definition of burnout which consists of three dimensions of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and feelings of reduced personal accomplishment [4, 5]. According to literature, efforts to prevent job burnout have been concentrated on decreasing job demand and providing employees with supplemental resources [6]. This study expands the literature by examining the relationship of spiritual intelligence with IT staffs burnout. Spiritual intelligence includes facing existential realities as freedom, feeling pain, death, and grappling with the perennial search for meaning [7].

Researches in the field of SI showed that SI can be followed with psychological health and SI development comprises and transcends personal growth, leading to more psychological health [7]. It can consequently be helpful in decreasing inner conflict or concerns. By better understanding the influence of spiritual intelligence on burnout, employees may be better able to reduce a variety of negative behavioral outcomes. The next section reviews job burnout and spiritual intelligence literature, and the corresponding hypotheses are tested using survey data from a sample of IT workers. Finally, research results will be discussed and some suggestions for future studies will be provided.

2. Literature Review

Burnout is described as a “syndrome or a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion, as well as cynicism towards one's work in response to chronic organizational stressors”[8]. Maslach and Jackson [4] defined job burnout as a “syndrome of emotional exhaustion and cynicism that occurs frequently among individuals who do ‘people work’ of some kind”. In another definition of job burnout, it is described as an emotional reaction to some stressors such as role ambiguity, absence of autonomy and absence of rewards or work overload [1]. Burnout consists of three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and feelings of reduced personal accomplishment [4, 8, 9, 3].

Emotional exhaustion is described as a feeling of being emotionally overextended and exhausted with work so employees feel physically tired, used up, and lacking capability to recover and be relaxed [23]. Emotional exhaustion is a key aspect of job burnout that associates with feelings of energy reduction, tiredness and absence of sensation [9].

Depersonalization or Cynicism includes negative attitudes toward coworkers and one’s job which associates with heightened willingness to leave the job [10]. It refers to a state in which the individual treats others impersonally and harshly [9].
Depersonalization is indicated by increased pessimism and individual’s tendency to abandon tasks [3]. Lower personal accomplishment is explained as “losing the feelings of being successful and adequately qualified and believing that the efforts he has been making are in vain” [8]. It refers to the sense of failure, Ineffectiveness, and absence of achievement in the job [10]. It makes individual feel ineffective and unsuccessful at work.

It has been discussed that Job burnout as an erosion of individual’s energy and resources, happens in a long period of time and associates with low performance and interpersonal conflict [11]. In various researches that have been done about organizational effects of burnout, it is argued that burnout leads to job turnover, absenteeism, and low morale [4], low job satisfaction and reduced organizational commitment [11, 1]. Burnout is affected by emotions and feelings of a person and it has been discussed that there is a relationship between Emotional intelligence and burnout [12]. Intelligence is a mental ability that is needed for adapting to, selecting and shaping of environmental context [13].

Gardner [14] categorizes intelligence into seven types: linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, an intrapersonal intelligence and interpersonal intelligence. His research revealed that different types of intelligence develop independently of one another and skillfulness in one domain does not refer to skillfulness in other domains [7].

In his classification he does not point out spiritual intelligence as a distinctive kind of intelligence that develops separately from other kinds. The last two intelligences are more personal. The first consists of one’s ability in understanding his/her own feeling and inner self, and the last intelligence refers to how an individual can perceive others feeling and thoughts and distinguishes their moods, intentions and their other features [14].

The last two intelligences are mostly related to emotional intelligence of a person. Emotional intelligence is an ability of monitoring and perceiving one’s own emotions and emotions of others in an interpersonal relationship [15]. Emotional intelligence comprises self-awareness and self-control, and also the ability to get along well with others. The latter refers to capability of a person in listening, communicating, accepting feedback as well as empathizing with various perspectives [7].

As emotional intelligence is embedded more in emotional resources, there is another intelligence that focuses more on spiritual abilities of individuals. Emotional intelligence is an ability of monitoring and perceiving one's own emotions and emotions of others in an interpersonal relationship [15].

One upper level of emotional intelligence that is recently considered by many of organizational researches and managers is spiritual intelligence. Spiritual intelligence involves the interior life of mind and spirit and also its relationship to the world. It is described to be a practice improving intrapersonal and interpersonal sensitivity [7]. Although spirituality is claimed to be related with burnout, the relationship between spiritual intelligence and burnout is not investigated widely [16].

Spirituality refers to the quality of human spirit that aims at happiness for oneself and others [17]. Spirituality consists of several abilities including “(a) focus on ultimate meaning, (b) awareness and development of multiple levels of
consciousness, (c) experience of the preciousness and sacredness of life, and (d) transcendence of self into a connected whole” [13]. When spirituality and intelligence are combined in a new context, they shape the new construct called spiritual intelligence that includes the ability of applying spirituality for adaptation and creation of valuable products and outcomes [13]. It relies on the ability of seeing things from various points of view, and understanding the relationship between perception, belief and behavior, and as other kinds of intelligence needs training and discipline [7].

Zohar and Marshall [18] describe SI as “the intelligence with which we address and solve problems of meaning and value, the intelligence with which we can place our actions and our lives in a wider, richer, meaning-giving context, the intelligence with which we can assess that one course of action or one life-path is more meaningful that another”. Spiritual maturity “subsumes a degree of emotional and moral maturity as well as ethical behavior” and include applying wisdom and compassion in communicating with others regardless of their demographic features (age, gender, origin ...) and also respect for all types of life. It encompasses some sense of existential freedom and morality. Spiritual maturity refers to the ability of a person in linking his interior mind and spirit with outer life of action and service and needs capability of self awareness to be improved [7].

Lynton and Thogersen [19] explain spiritual intelligence as the intelligence through which an individual can be aware of his/her values, purposes, meaning and highest motivations.

As it was explained, it is possible for a person to have constant access to pure awareness which includes awareness of all levels. Such awareness can be sustained through walking, dreaming and sleeping states as it is always present in all three moods [7].

Aram and Dryer [20] developed an integrative framework for measuring spiritual intelligence called Integrated Spiritual Intelligence Scale (ISIS). ISIS consists of an 83-item self report that includes 22 capability scale and 5 major domains namely, Meaning, Consciousness, Grace, Transcendence, and Truth. King [21] introduced a measurement tool for measuring spiritual intelligence that includes four features (a) critical existential thinking, (b) personal meaning production, (c) transcendental awareness, and (d) conscious state expansion.

Critical Existential Thinking. Existential thinking, in a simple description refers to thinking about one’s existence which is a part of spiritual intelligence definition [21]. Critical existential thinking is described as “actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication” [22]. King and DeCicco [23] defined this dimension of spiritual intelligence as an ability of thinking critically about existential issues like meaning, purpose, death and etc. As Gardner [24] explained, existential thinking is a process of engaging with existential issues. Therefore it can be defined as a desire to “engage with ultimate concerns and the capacity to carry out a meaning-making process that locates oneself in relation to these existential issues” [25].

Personal Meaning Production. As King and DeCicco [23] explained Personal Meaning Production, is the capability “to construct personal meaning and purpose in
all physical and mental experiences, including the capacity to create and master a life purpose”. It is also referred to a state in which individuals “have a sense of direction, have a purpose in life and a sense of order and a reason for existence” [26].

Transcendental Awareness. This aspect presents the ability of going beyond one’s personal limitations which is associated with integration of individual purposes with larger ones [27]. Transcendental awareness also is defined as “capacity to perceive transcendent dimensions of the self (e.g., a transcendent self), of others, and of the physical world (e.g., nonmaterialism, interconnectedness) during the normal, waking state of consciousness” [23].

Conscious State Expansion. As king and DeCicco [23] described Conscious State Expansion involves “the ability to enter spiritual states of consciousness at one’s own discretion”. He classified spiritual states in three types of consciousness as cosmic consciousness, pure consciousness and uniteconsciousness. Cosmic consciousness refers to the awareness of order of the whole world which goES along with a sense of eternity. The state of consciousness that he called pure consciousness pertains to “a silent state of inner wakefulness with no object of thought or perception”. Unitive consciousness is the other type is an understanding that all aspects of life are ingredients of a unified whole [21].

This paper examines the relationship between spiritual intelligence and job burnout in information technology staffs. King’s SISRI-24 questionnaire was used as it measures spiritual intelligence elements accurately and comprehensively. Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) was also used to measure job burnout aspects. The following section presents statistical hypothesis and survey results. Finally, research results will be discussed and some suggestion for future studies will be offered.

3. Problem Description

It is found out that burnout negatively affects not only employees but also the whole organization [28]. Therefore most researches in this field were conducted to see how organization can prevent costly effects of burnout. Recently it is explained that most studies in this field are guided to concentrate on human strengths and optimal functioning instead of focusing on negative situations [29]. Although there are a lot of studies on how destructive employee burnout can be, studies on how improving employees’ capabilities, such as spiritual intelligence, are limited. It is needed to have more empirical evidence on new abilities through which burnout can be prevented. This research concentrates on spiritual intelligence’s impact on burnout among IT staffs.

4. Methodology

The proposed conceptual model is shown in figure 1. As the figure demonstrates, the hypothesis of the research is as follow:

Hypothesis: Spiritual Intelligence has a direct effecton the Burn Out of information technology staffs.
A survey instrument consisted of 29 items was developed to measure two constructs of the model. The items included in the survey are presented in Appendix A. A five-point Likert scale was used to measure respondent’s agreement or disagreement from (1) “strongly disagree” to (5) “strongly agree”. The sample population consisted of information technology staffs dealing with information technology related products and services. The questionnaire was pre-tested on 20 experts to evaluate the questionnaire’s validity with regard to clarity, bias, ambiguous questions, and relevance to the business environment. After pre-testing and revising, the questionnaires were distributed among more than 200 information technology staffs, and 130 were collected. Various minimum sample sizes for the structural equation modeling (SEM) approach have been recommended. Taking into consideration Bollen’s suggestion of a minimum sample size of 100, the sample size of 130 in this study is adequate. Data were collected over a month, and questionnaires were distributed via email.

Table 1 presents the test of reliability including Cronbach alpha explained by each construct. Both constructs have Cronbach’s alpha of greater than .60 [30].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>SI</th>
<th>B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cronbach’s Alpha</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Demographics of research respondents present that nearly 53% of the people in the sample were graduated and most of them were experts. Most of the research sample had less than 7 year seniority and almost 88% of them were in the range of 26-35 years old. The profile of respondents is shown in Table 2.
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Table 2. Profile of the respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>4.62</td>
<td></td>
<td>Up to 25</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>55.38</td>
<td></td>
<td>26 to 35</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>88.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisors/Managers</td>
<td>23.85</td>
<td></td>
<td>36 to 45</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6.923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23.08</td>
<td></td>
<td>46 to 55</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>More than 56</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work Experience</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Up to 3</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>23.08</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 to 7</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>43.08</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>28.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 to 11</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>23.08</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>52.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10.77</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Analysis. The proposed model was evaluated applying SEM approach, using LISREL 8.53. SEM is a comprehensive statistical approach to test the hypotheses about relations among observed and latent variables [31]. The descriptive statistics of dependent and independent variables were also computed by SPSS software. Tables 3 shows mean values and standard deviations of scales. A variety of indices, generated by LISREL, were used to evaluate the model’s goodness of fit. Chi-square/degree of freedom with values of less than three indicating acceptable fit ($\chi^2$/df), root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA) with values below 0.08 representing acceptable fit, normalized fit index (NFI), goodness of fit index (GFI) and comparative fit index (CFI) greater than 0.9 and adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI) greater than 0.8 and less than 0.1 are representatives of good fit. The results of indices are shown in table 4.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independent variable : SpiritualIntelligence (King, 2008)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Existential Thinking(SI1)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>3.0615</td>
<td>0.85139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Meaning Production(SI2)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>3.2000</td>
<td>1.02223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcendental Awareness (SI3)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>3.1231</td>
<td>0.91512</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscious State Expansion(SI4)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>3.2615</td>
<td>1.03095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent variable : Burnout (Maslach, 1981)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Exhaustion(B1)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>3.1308</td>
<td>1.05204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Accomplishment (B2)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>3.0077</td>
<td>0.83986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depersonalization (B3)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>2.8385</td>
<td>1.00235</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4. Statistics Of Model Fit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fit indices</th>
<th>Recommended value</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$\chi^2$/df</td>
<td>≤ 3.00</td>
<td>1.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation (RMSEA)</td>
<td>≤ 0.08</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI)</td>
<td>≥ 0.80</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normed Fit Index (NFI)</td>
<td>≥ 0.9</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparative Fit Index (CFI)</td>
<td>≥ 0.9</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)</td>
<td>≥ 0.9</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Results and Discussion

This study has tried to investigate the relation between spiritual intelligence and job burnout. According to the results, 19% of the variance in the employee Burn Out was explained by Spiritual Intelligence ($R^2 = 0.19$). A graphical presentation of the results is depicted in figure 2. Our main hypothesis was largely supported by the data, and shows spiritual intelligence has a strong direct effect on Burn Out ($\beta = 0.34$).

Captari [32], in studying the correlation between burnout and spirituality among Resident Assistants, found that, although small, a correlation between spirituality and burnout was achieved. He mentioned that RAs with higher level of spiritual maturity were more able to cope with hard situation so were expected to be more resilient towards burnout.

One of the main factors that lead to burn out is job demand which is high, specifically, in IT profession. The job pressures can lead to fatigue, stress and isolation which may consequently contribute to burnout. Jackson, Schwab and Schuller [33] asserted that individuals who have emotionally demanding jobs often had feelings of fatigue and excessive tiredness. It was claimed that achievement and organization expectations are two factors that have significant roles in causing burnout.

Burnout can lead to a reduction of energy, lacking of creation, sensing of separation from others, and feeling, of physical and psychological discomfort [32]. Freudenberger [34] indicated several physical and behavioral symptoms that are associated with burnout. Feelings of fatigue, gastrointestinal disturbances, and a sense of lingering cold were some of the physical signs that were explained to be the results of burnout in individuals. He also identified some behavioral symptoms as high irritability, increased paranoia, stubbornness, and rigidity. As it was mentioned it is
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critical for managers to recognize how they can reduce negative effects of burnout and significantly how burnout can be prevented. Regarding the results, spirituality can be considered as a factor that would be helpful in psychological and physical healthiness by preventing phenomena such as burnout in employees.

The workplace spirituality was considered as an experience of trust and interconnectedness that individuals obtain during work processes. This spirituality is achieved through individual goodwill and it results in a motivational organizational culture that is formed by collective efforts, and includes reciprocity and solidarity [35]. Spirituality in workplace leads to improved organizational performance and is addressed by lasting organizational excellence [35]. The organizational benefits of spirituality involve improvement of organizational performance, employees’ involvement and satisfaction, and increased rates of return on investment [15].

Spirituality in workplace leads to improved organizational performance and is addressed by lasting organizational excellence [35]. The organizational benefits of spirituality involve improvement of organizational performance, employees’ involvement and satisfaction, and increased rates of return on investment [15].

Spirituality at work involves [36]:
1. Working towards the realisation of the highest potential in each individual (working from a paradigm of collaboration rather than competition).
2. Seeking to embody spiritual values (love, acceptance, compassion, forgiveness, integrity, honesty) in all that we do and in all our relationships.
3. Making space for all that stops us – we might call this working with the shadow, and the ‘inner critic’ or judge.
4. Acting in ways that acknowledge, embrace and enhance the presence of something beyond the physical here and now, beyond that which we can perceive with our senses of touch, taste, smell, sight and hearing.

As Alfred [36] mentioned, a willingness to live in the realm of chaos, respecting intuition and more responsible managers are the consequences of fostering spirituality in an organization.

6. Conclusions and Future Works

The purpose of the present study was to examine the relationship between Spiritual Intelligence and job burnout. Research results indicated that the spiritual intelligence has a significant impact on job burnout. Regarding the results, spirituality can lead to a decrease in employee burnout if it can be improved. Spiritual intelligence was demonstrated as an important feature that affects burnout and assists managers in keeping talents in organization. Employees with high levels of spirituality can think beyond ordinary issues in their job as they seek to find the meaning and purposes of their life. This competency can able them to tolerate even hard situations of their work and continue their job. As we indicated previously, one of the main problems of IT professions is the high pressures that they receive from their job and work environment, so job abandonment have recently increased in IT field. Spiritual intelligence can be considered a factor that should be improved in IT workers in order to increase their capability in tolerating hard situations. This paper has identified that burnout can be decreased by improving spiritual intelligence in employees, but more research is needed to find out how spiritual intelligence must be improved in IT sector, and how all components of this intelligence can affect burnout effectively. Also, there is a need to investigate other variables having effect on burn out of information technology staff, such as, culture or organizational citizenship behavior.
References
Appendix A. Survey instrument

Independent variable
Spiritual Intelligence
Critical Existential Thinking (SI1)
I have spent time contemplating the purpose or reason for my existence
I am able to deeply contemplate what happens after death
I have developed my own theories about such things as life, death, reality, and existence
I have often contemplated the relationship between human beings and the rest of the universe

Personal Meaning Production (SI2)
My ability to find meaning and purpose in life helps me adapt to stressful situations
I am able to define a purpose or reason for my life
When I experience a failure, I am still able to find meaning in it
I am able to find meaning and purpose in my everyday experiences

Transcendental Awareness (SI3)
I recognize aspects of myself that are deeper than my physical body
I am aware of a deeper connection between myself and other people
I am highly aware of the nonmaterial aspects of life
Recognizing the nonmaterial aspects of life helps me feel centered

Conscious State Expansion (SI4)
I am able to enter higher states of consciousness or awareness
I can control when I enter higher states of consciousness or awareness
I am able to move freely between levels of consciousness or awareness
I often see issues and choices more clearly while in higher states of consciousness/awareness

Dependent variable
Burn Out (Reverse coded)
Emotional Exhaustion (B1)
I feel emotionally drained from my work
I feel used up at the end of the workday
I feel frustrated by my job

Working with people directly puts too much stress on me

Personal Accomplishment (B2)
I deal very effectively with the problems of my recipients
I feel I'm positively influencing other people's lives through my work
I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job
I feel very energetic

Depersonalization (B3)
I feel I treat some recipients as if they were impersonal 'objects
I don't really care what happens to some Recipients
I've become more callous toward people since I took this job
I worry that this job is hardening me emotionally