

Growing from the Inside Out : An Exploratory Investigation Into the Construct – Spirituality

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Abstract

Our quest for understanding the universe and laws associated with it has driven civilization to a realization that laws of nature, the supreme, and growing from the inside out is the real education that one can have. Growing from inside out is the path of spirituality that each one pursues. This research paper made a humble attempt towards examining the nature and meaning of the notion 'spirituality' and individual metaphors people hold towards it across professions. We used qualitative data for exploring the concept of spirituality among the professionals from various professions. This exploratory study led to 15 propositions. The thematic map presented in this paper helped in developing propositions for studying the complex, abstract, and abstruse concept of spirituality.

Keywords : spirituality, professionals, qualitative research, thematic map, laws of nature

JEL Classification : I31, Z10, Z12

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Finding meaning in life has been a core search of human beings for generations. Understanding the spirit and its existence is always a source of delusion in human minds (Freeman, 1998). Spirituality is not a different identity ; it is a part of the human identity itself (Macquarrie, 1972). Though there is a lot of interest in spirituality, the definition of the construct is under researched (George et al., 2000 ; Martsolf & Mickley, 1998) because of its subjectivity (Miller, 1999). The aim of the research is to understand the meaning of spirituality from various professionals' point of view. The research question for the study is : What is the meaning of spirituality to you ? The present study is one of the first studies of its kind, which has tried to understand spirituality from the working professionals' point of view through a series of semi-structured interviews.

Spirituality has occupied a central place in research in various disciplines, including business. While there is a deliberate attempt being made to understand what it is and its nomothetic underpinnings, there is no absolute and clear understanding on the concept 'spirituality.' Spirituality as a notion and field is deep and growing, which can be seen by ever increasing number of scholarly publications as well as large number of

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well-organized conferences around the globe by renowned business schools and other institutions. A perusal of the published research and proceedings of the seminars, conferences, and workshops revealed that the findings of the scholars are based on empirical scientific data. From analysis of the data, the researchers have deduced about the nature of 'spirituality.' So, we observe that unlike philosophers who posit about the nature of 'spirituality,' the ongoing research studies have attempted to make the investigations empirical, deductive, and therefore prove it to be scientific.

Literature Review

The term spirituality has many shades of meaning. Accordingly, there are many definitions of spirituality. According to Vaughan (1991), the experience of the sacred varies in accordance to one's understanding and living of his/her life in accordance with the perceived ultimate meaning and value. One's conception of spirituality is determined by the unalloyed bliss that discards the egoistic notion of the individual and tries to cultivate a habit for working for the well-being of the universe (Alok, 2017).

In the various stresses of life like competition, stress, and emotional turmoil, it is very essential to have a poised mind for individual well-being and success, and more importantly, to sustain in this chaotic world, there is a dire need of solace, and this void is filled with spirituality (Shivdas & Chandrasekhar, 2016). Apart from individual well-being, spirituality also enriches the quality of workplaces through creating a positive environment at the workplace which motivates individuals and team members (Prabhu et al., 2016) and enhances financial performance (George & Alex, 2013). Though there are a number of studies about the positive implications of spirituality, but defining spirituality is an area which is hardly touched upon and which is elusive in nature (Damiano et al., 2019 ; Gall et al., 2011 ; McSherry & Cash, 2004 ; Senreich, 2013 ; Paul Victor & Treschuk, 2020).

There are different views on spirituality, that is, the Hindu view and the Western view. The same details have been explained in the subsequent sections.

Hindu View of Spirituality

The classical Hindu texts have defined spirituality in many ways. In this tradition, spirituality is called as "*Adhyātma*". The term "Adhyātma" etymologically is derived from two words, *Ādhi* and *Ātman*. *Ādhi* means pertaining to the nature of and *Ātman* is soul. Therefore, *Adhyātma* means pertaining to the soul. Spirituality thus deals with the nature of the soul. *Adhyātma* can also be analyzed as follows : *Ā+Dhī+Ātman*. *Ā* means up to, *Dhī* refers to the total energy in the body, and *Ātman* refers to the soul. Thus, spirituality (*Adhyātma*) refers to the process of transportation of total energy in the body to the soul (Hindu Janajagruti Samiti, n.d.).

Spirituality is about interconnecting the relationship between *Jīva* (the individual self), *Jāgat* (the universe), and *Ishwārā* (the God) (Mahadevan, 2013). Spirituality is a search for spirit and a quest for unalloyed bliss of a natural state. It is a journey from inside to inner-side, the subtle corners of the soul. It is a search for bliss (*ānāṇḍā*). One is in a state of bliss when he/she has boundless contentment and happiness.

Śācchīṭānāṇḍā is the natural state of the soul. However, being involved in the affairs of the world, the soul loses its natural state. In order to reclaim it, we have to undertake sincere and systematic spiritual practices. Being happy, being satisfied, and performing one's duties for their own sake and not achieving certain ends are integral parts of spirituality.

Western View of Spirituality

The notions of spirituality are always above the individual ego-centric notions and strivings, it cultivates a compassionate view towards all animate and inanimate subjects/objects, assuming it to be the source of spirit

(Bouckaert & Zsolnai, 2012). Believing in the universal energy is also a part of spirituality. Focusing on the purpose and meaning are the cornerstones of spirituality. Spirituality is about “interconnectedness,” which is based on an individual's innermost experience (Mitroff & Denton, 1999).

Spirituality focuses on the transformation of an individual at micro-level and of a society at a meso-level (King, 1993). The notion of spirituality can be also expressed in the terms of behaviours, virtues, ethics, and values (Nathan, 1997 ; Wagner-Marsh & Conley, 1999).

Spirituality is also about integrating the principles, philosophies, and practices that help an individual soul to merge with the supreme soul (Harlos, 2000).

Research Problem

The notion of spirituality is complex. It means different things to different people and meanings also vary from context to context. What adds to the complexity is the fact that the experience called 'spiritual experience' can only be personal or individual. There is no constituent of universality in it. What one person can call as a 'spiritual experience' may be mundane for another. Due to this, there is no 'essence' of the concept of spirituality and hence it doesn't have a sharp and precise definition. Its various usages can at the most be said to have family resemblance. The current study's primary goal is to understand the meaning of 'spirituality' from the lens of different professionals which may provide a new meaning and direction to understand spirituality.

Research Methodology

The present study is rooted in exploratory research design and used a non-probabilistic convenience sampling. The present study used semi-structured interviews as a method for collecting responses as when the research question is known in advance, and the researcher is keen to have similar types of information, semi-structured interviews are apt in that situation (Kallio et al., 2016). We obtained consent from the selected sample members through a request letter for conducting the interviews. The sample members were selected from various domains like academia, medical, armed forces, and institutional leaders (see Table 1). The study was conducted in 2019.

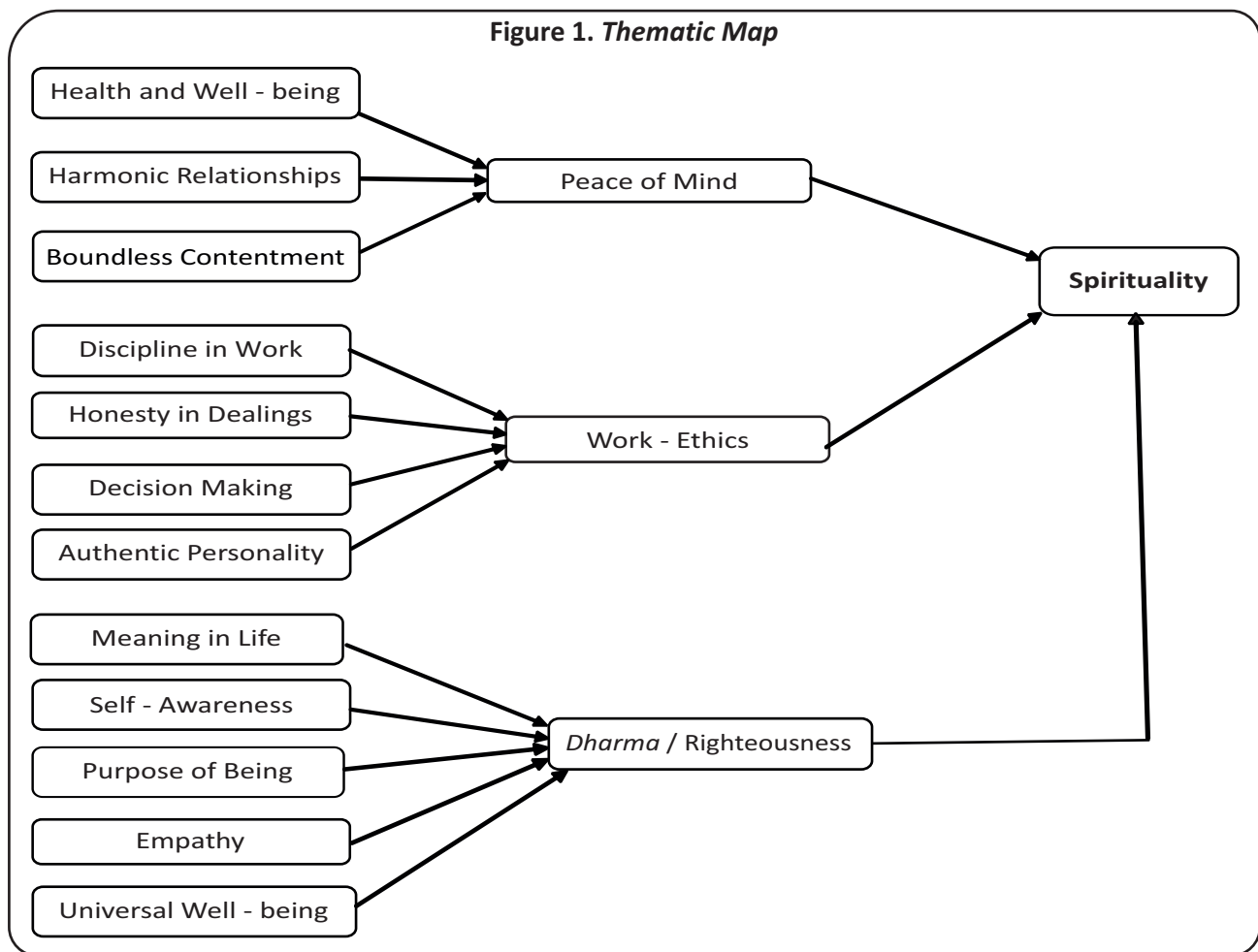
Table 1. Sample Profile Based on Respondents' Profession

Sl. No.	Profession	Total No. of Respondents
1	Academicians	16
2	Doctors	11
3	Armed Forces	09
4	Institutional Leaders	14
Total		50

Data Analysis and Discussion

The recording process was conducted through Sony recorder device which is apt for voice recording and for noise reduction and clarity facilities. The responses to the semi-structured interviews were recorded in verbatim. The duration of the interview varied among respondents and fairly around 15 – 30 minutes were spent per participant. We printed the transcripts of interviews and used them for data analysis.

Two cycles of coding were followed for analysis of verbatim data. Codes were divided and tabulated for analysis in the primary stage. Based on the description, SPSS content analysis was done for combining similar



statements/opinions amongst the qualitative data collected during the study for conducting analysis based on themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006 ; Gavin, 2008 ; Guest et al., 2012).

There are various approaches and alternatives for developing summary and synthesis through data theming. Based on the perspectives, integration of the objectives and outcomes play a pivotal role in research (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2006). Process like coding for the verbatim, discovering common codes through a valid comparison with other codes was conducted to enhance the rigor of the study. We adopted thematic analysis for deriving final constructs from the common codes and analyzed the codes through established literature and arrived at the themes and constructs.

The study participants were very much productive in providing various perspectives of spirituality, which intrigued us for further exploration, post which a comparative analysis of the verbatim statements was conducted to eliminate repetitions. For instance, peace of mind, contentment, health and well-being were the recurrent themes. After that, themes quoted by the respondents were searched in the literature for their relevance. We then developed 15 propositions which are incorporated in the thematic map (see Figure 1).

Propositions

📌 **P1 : Health and well-being and peace of mind are positively related.**

Health and well-being can be addressed in various ways. It can be from a physical perspective (Nyström & Andersson - Segesten, 1990) as well as psychological (Cooper & Cartwright, 1994) and mental perspectives (Anderson & Grunert, 1997). Danna and Griffin (1999), in their seminal work, highlighted and discussed the primary factors associated with health and well-being along with their consequences. Røysamb et al. (2003) validated that people who had high subjective well-being reported better health. Similar to the above studies, there are other studies that validated that high subjective well-being develops a strong immune system which promotes healthy behavior and reduces the risk of addiction to alcohol and drugs (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2011). Diener and Tov (2007) validated the relationship between subjective well-being and peace. The earlier studies support the above proposition.

✍ **P2 : Harmonic relationships and peace of mind are positively related.**

A harmonic relationship is defined as 'the balance achieved in relationships' (Kwan et al., 1997). It has been found that harmonic relationships contribute towards an individual's life satisfaction and have a positive effect on an individual's psychological well-being.

✍ **P3 : Boundless contentment and peace of mind are positively related.**

Contentment is a human experience indissolubly tangled with feeling happy, satisfied, and tranquil (Pearsall, 1995). Thus, when one is content, it automates the state of peace. Contentment results in vigorous commitment to social activities (Carp & Christensen, 1986 ; Myers & Diener, 1995) and subjective well-being (Jacob & Guarnaccia, 1997).

✍ **P4 : Peace of mind and spirituality are positively related.**

Nathan (1997) explored various dimensions of spirituality in a clinical context. He validated that spirituality provides meaning, hope, and peace of mind. It also plays the role of an enabler in providing various coping mechanisms in living a well-balanced life. Another study by Chan et al. (2006) highlighted the usage of 'body – mind – spirit' framework in a clinical context through application of spirituality. Their results revealed that the practice of spirituality is multi-dimensional and multi-levelled, which had positive associations with various interventions. Narayanasamy (2004) highlighted the role of spiritual needs and provided the methodology adopted for implementing the spiritual care which was diversified in nature and catered to the psychological needs of an individual. Brillhart (2005) observed that the quality of life index has got a higher side which focuses on exploring new life opportunities and complete new outlook for life, which is a significant attribute for peace of mind.

✍ **P5 : Discipline in work and work-ethics are positively related.**

Thornborrow and Brown (2009) focused on the desired identity mechanisms towards discipline and work ethics in the context of paratroopers and developed various insights to propagate individual contexts. Brown and Lewis (2011) empirically examined and theorized about the discourse identities regarding discipline and work in an organizational context.

✍ **P6 : Honesty in dealings and work-ethics are positively related.**

Becker (1998) extended the concept of integrity from honesty and analyzed the implications of it in an organizational context, which is one of the core aspects of work behavior. Schwartz (2005), in his paper,

extensively reviewed the importance of moral values that can be incorporated in organizations. Raiborn and Payne (1990) defined honesty as one of the moral principles which has a significant impact in the context of decision in a business setting. Payne et al. (1997) proposed honesty as one value principle that can be practiced in multi-national companies derived from host country societies. Dumas and Blodgett (1999) examined 50 family business mission statements which determined honesty as a set of moral values which have significance in business.

🔗 **P7 : Decision-making and work ethics are positively related.**

Trevino (1986) developed a model which offered insights into the variables on individual as well as situational contexts for ethical decision making. He also developed various variables and their relationships with work ethics through literature survey. Jones (1991) proposed an issue-contingent model which explored about the influences that affected individual decision making on the grounds of social psychology. Treviño et al. (2001) investigated and validated role of code of ethics in a structural context as a driving force for most of the processes in organizations. O'Fallon and Butterfield (2005) conducted a critical review of ethical decision making literature and drew various insights from individual as well as organizational contexts. Heyler et al. (2016) conducted a qualitative study by following a grounded approach for developing an inductive model that incorporated ethics in decision making.

🔗 **P8 : Authentic personality and work-ethics are positively related.**

Van den Bosch and Taris (2014) examined the relationship between authenticity at work, well-being, and work outcomes. As per Kernis and Goldman (2006) and Hannah et al. (2011), authenticity is studied at an individual level as well as at team level. Wood et al. (2008) postulated a theory that people who are authentic stick to their self and display a positive relationship with well-being and work outcomes.

🔗 **P9 : Work-ethics and spirituality are positively related.**

Benefiel et al. (2014) explored various dimensions of spirituality which can be integrated with different notions of a workplace. Krishnakumar and Neck (2002) viewed spirituality by different lenses that can be applied to organizations for enriching various ethical practices in individual as well as the context of workplace. Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003) validated that spirituality enhances workplace experiences on an ethical dimension. Butts (1999) integrated various dimensions of spirituality that not only expands consciousness levels of the spirit, but also enhances the workplace experience by inculcating values.

🔗 **P10 : Meaning in life and *Dharma*/Righteous life are positively related.**

Dharma is a well-defined code of conduct which posits doing what is right for the individual, the family, the caste (*jati*), the society, and the universe (Sinha, 2002). Sinha tried to relate the meaning with indigenous psychologies by inculcating integrative aspects of life. King et al. (2006) conducted six studies to validate how meaning in life produced a positive effect on an individual's experience. They observed that a positive effect may propel an individual to lead a righteous life. Battista and Almond (1973) empirically defined and validated meaning in life which propels an individual to lead a positive life based on the self-belief notion.

🔗 **P11 : Self-awareness and dharma/righteous life are positively related.**

Kellner (2010) related the concept of self-awareness with internal subjective domain. His paper explored

Buddhist epistemological discourses for a comparative analysis of the previous commentaries. The paper concluded that self-awareness with subjective inner awareness was part and parcel of a righteous life. Vago and Silbersweig (2012) developed a framework comprising of self-awareness, self-control, and self-transcendence and a neurobiological model through meditation which can be used to understand the inner chambers of the heart of an individual and to remove the distortions which cause an individual to move away from awareness, leading to a righteous life.

☞ **P12 : Purpose of being and dharma/righteous life are positively related.**

Reker et al. (1987) analyzed life-attitude and well-being of individuals across various age and gender groups. They validated by positing that those who lead their life with a purpose lead a healthy life, promoting a righteous life. Warren (2012) was of the view that being successful and fulfilling your life purpose are not at all the same issue. One can reach all one's personal goals and become a raving success and yet miss the purposes for which God created him/her. The purpose of being should be aligned with a righteous life which can enhance the quality of life.

☞ **P13 : Empathy and dharma/righteous life are positively related.**

Davis (1983) analyzed individual differences with respect to empathy. He validated the multi dimensionality approach to empathy with respect to undergraduate students. Preston and De Waal (2002) analyzed models and mechanisms of empathy to explore its divergent nature in the context of demographics on various aspects of life.

☞ **P14 : Universal well-being and dharma/righteous life are positively related.**

Ryan and Deci (2001) researched on the well-being construct about its multi-dimensionality. They validated the construct with methodological rigor by adopting multi-level analysis covering the nature of well-being and its different antecedents.

☞ **P15 : Dharma/righteous life and spirituality are positively related.**

Dharma comes from the Sanskrit root '*Dhri*,' meaning 'to uphold, support or sustain,' thus in the original meaning of the word, dharma is what upholds existence – life and growth – being and becoming (Dhand, 2002). Everyone who is in a quest of transcendence or leading a path of Dharma has intimate connection with spirituality (Sulmasy, 2002).

During the thematic analysis, 11 new themes defining spirituality include the following: internal state, meaning of life, essence of all substances, root of existence, soul-consciousness, search for spirit, a quest for unsurpassed contentment/happiness, awareness of one's own-self, sense of interconnectedness, transcendence, love and compassion. Based on the thematic map with its roots on the propositions, we have conceptualized various themes, that is, health and well-being, harmonic relationships, boundless contentment, discipline in work, honesty in dealings, decision-making, authentic personality, meaning in life, self-awareness, purpose of being, empathy, universal well-being, peace of mind, work-ethics, and Dharma/righteous life.

Implications

Theoretical Contributions

The present study is one of the few studies which have tried to understand spirituality from the view of various

professionals by adopting a qualitative approach. This extends the theory of spirituality from an Indian perspective rather than a Western perspective. The concept analysis adds to the body of existing knowledge on spirituality.

Managerial Contributions

The research offers meaningful insights for management practitioners and organizational researchers by providing different themes that drive peace of mind, work-ethics, and a righteous life. As a consequence, managers can focus on cultivating virtues and eradicating vices which can make an organization sustainable.

Conclusion

Spirituality is a multidimensional construct. Some aspects of spirituality can be comprehended but can't be quantified (Bruce et al., 2011 ; Clarke, 2009 ; Nolan, 2009 ; Pesut, 2013). Understanding spirituality from various lenses is one of the key features of the current study. Defining the “undefined” is arduous, however, by exploring various themes related to it, future researchers and readers can work on the same.

Limitations of the Study and Scope for Further Research

Getting appointment for scheduling an interview with the respondents was a tough task and having 10–15 minutes for an interview may be the primary limitations of the present study. Previous research mostly focused on quantitative research. Future research can look for experimental and longitudinal research designs. The study explores various themes along with the propositions that define and connect spirituality with various variables that need further empirical investigation. Variables like peace of mind, work-ethics, dharma/righteous life with spirituality along with other antecedents, that is, health and well-being, harmonic relationships, boundless contentment, honesty in dealings, decision making, authentic personality, meaning in life, self-awareness, purpose of being, empathy, and universal well-being may be a fruitful research extension on the domain. Exploring spirituality from the lens of corporate, academia, blue-collar/white-collar employees, jail inmates, and college students will be a great scope in studying spirituality and may provide enriching results.

Authors' Contribution

Tapas Bantha in consultation with Prof. (Dr.) Tapan Kumar Panda conceived the idea and developed qualitative design to undertake the empirical study. Tapas Bantha extracted research papers with high reputation, filtered these based on keywords, and generated concepts and codes relevant to the study design. Prof. (Dr.) Tapan Kumar Panda verified the analytical methods and supervised the study. The interviews were conducted by Mr. Tapas Bantha in English language. For obtaining the consent of the interviewers, Prof. (Dr.) Sanjeev P. Sahni played a prominent role due to which the study could be carried out. The qualitative analysis with coding and thematic mapping was done by Tapas Bantha using SPSS 20.0. The title and the major portion of the abstract were written by Prof. (Dr.) Tapan Kumar Panda. Tapas Bantha wrote the manuscript in consultation with both the other authors, that is, Prof. (Dr.) Tapan Kumar Panda and Prof. (Dr.) Sanjeev P. Sahni.

Conflict of Interest

The authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest, or non-financial interest in the subject matter, or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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