Chapter 7
Philosophy and Management: The Relevance of Vedanta in Management

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the Vedanta, an ancient Indian religious philosophy; and its relevance to management. Chinmayananda (2003) asserted that from time to time ancient philosophies like Vedanta needs intelligent re-interpretation to apply effectively in the context of modern times. Vedanta recommends a management approach, which focuses on exploring the inner world of the self. It begins with the manager's awareness and development of the self, as the greatness in any field is never achieved without tremendous self-realization and self-discipline (Avinashilingam, 1975). This chapter is based on a qualitative research methodology called hermeneutics, which involves the interpretation of ancient or classical literature and the content analysis of selected verses from the Vedanta (Vedic literatures) especially the Bhagavad-Gita. This chapter provides a framework to study the Indian management from a religious, philosophical and cultural perspective. This will be relevant to Indian managers and foreign managers managing in Indian context.

INTRODUCTION

Religion is spiritual and spirituality can also be considered to be religious. There are people who are spiritual but not religious and vice versa. Spirituality is concerned with self-realization and growing into and experiencing the Divine consciousness and realization; religion on the other hand usually entails adhering to a certain dogma or belief system. For many people, spirituality and religion within the context of management at workplace have little in common. However, spirituality and religion have a great impact to workplace and there has been a tremendous growth and interest in this area lately (Arunsimha, 2008; Muniapan, 2010).

Spirituality and religion have the power to shape the management vision and their ethical and moral decision making (Muniapan & Dass, 2008). Apart from the spiritual and religious schools of thought such as Islam, Christianity, *Vedanta*, Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism, people are also exploring philosophy, transpersonal psychology, meditation, yoga and astrology and its relevance to their work. There has also been an increasing interest in integrating spirituality and management as the numbers of articles on spirituality in management journals are increasing (Kale & Shrivastava, 2003 cited in Muniapan 2007). Besides, numerous conferences, articles, books, courses springing up on the subject of spirituality also confirm the explosion of interest in spirituality as new dimension of management (Howard, 2002). Abraham Maslow's "hierarchy of needs" suggests that if work helps to fulfill personal and security needs, and social needs, and self esteem need, the employee would tend to become more oriented towards self actualization needs and being (spiritual) needs (Butts, 1999 cited in Muniapan, 2007).

In the analysis of workplace spirituality, there are three most popular viewpoints of spirituality namely intrinsic-origin view, the religious view and the existentialist view. The intrinsic-origin view of spirituality argues that spirituality is a concept or principle from inside an individual. Guillory's (2000, p. 33 cited in Krishnakumar and Neck, 2002) definition falls within this perspective as he defines spirituality as "our inner consciousness" and "that which is spiritual comes from within-beyond our programmed beliefs and values". This perspective of spirituality argues that spirituality is something, which is beyond the rules of religion.

The religious views of spirituality are those that are specific to a particular religion. For example, the Christians believe that spirituality is the "call for work", the Hindus believe that spirituality is in doing the work with utmost devotion, the Buddhist's view hard work and devotion are the tools to modify an individual's life, Islam preaches its followers to be more committed to their organization and encourages cooperation and consultation. Other views like Taosim and Confucianism also propose the importance on teamwork and togetherness (Krishnakumar & Neck, 2002).

Existentialist view of spirituality on the other hand according to Krishnakumar and Neck (2002) is connected to the concepts such as the search for meaning of what we are doing at workplace. Some of the existential questions, which come up are why am I doing this work, what is the meaning of the work I am doing, where does this lead me to and is there a reason for my existence and the organization's, etc.

Research suggests that the encouragement of spirituality in the workplace can lead to benefits in the areas of creativity, honesty and trust, personal fulfillment, and commitment, which will ultimately lead to increased organizational performance Krishnakumar and Neck (2002); Muniapan (2006).

THE VEDANTA

This chapter explores the religious views of spirituality with reference to *Vedanta*, an ancient Indian religious philosophy; and its relevance to management. *Vedanta* is a branch of Hinduism[1] (as it is known today) and is as wide as the ocean. It has been interpreted in various ways. In Hinduism there are many schools from different traditions. McDaniel (2007) distinguishes six generic "types" of Hinduism, in an attempt to accommodate a variety of views on the subject: These are:

1. Folk Hinduism, as based on local traditions and cults of local deities at a communal level.
2. *Vedic*[2] Hinduism as still being practiced by traditionalist *brahmins* (for example *shrautins*[3]).

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