Human Potential: Self-Efficacy, Collective-Efficacy, and God-Efficacy

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Abstract

Bandura (1997) observes, "People guide their lives by their beliefs of personal efficacy. Perceived self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainment" (p. 3). This definition suggests the possibility that such beliefs can be self-limiting. The reality is that most people understand the need for help in many aspects of life and are not totally independent. This gives rise to other realms of efficacious behavior: collective efficacy, team efficacy, and organizational efficacy. The role of workplace spirituality adds another dimension to the question of efficacious behavior, suggesting individuals reach beyond self-limitations, possibly for help from a supernatural deity — a *God efficacy*. Unfortunately, for many theorists, there is a humanistic framework for workplace spirituality as one attributed to ideology *sans a supernatural deity.* The logical fallacy is that the result is still self-limiting because it suggests spirituality is an innate characteristic that is self-dependent. Others attribute the nature of spirituality to the existence of a deity that offers to individuals the resource of *God-Efficacy* as a means of dealing with problems on or off the job. The congruence between self-efficacy and workplace spirituality might better be understood as a matter of hope in one's source of strength. For some it is hope predicated on faith in self, teams, organization, or fate; for others it is a hope in God.

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Bandura (1997) observes, "People guide their lives by their beliefs of personal efficacy. Perceived self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainment" (p. 3). The role of self-efficacy is important to the understanding of autonomous and self-directed learning, central to issues of motivation, and instrumental in cognitive and affective processes in human behaviors. Efficacy is framed from the individual, collective, and organizational perspectives by Bandura (1997) whose work on self-efficacy provides great insight into *the exercise of control*, in terms of human agency and self-determination. Self-efficacious behaviors indicate humans intend to work from a position of strength, first by having control of their own destinies, second by pursuing self-actualization, and third by attempting to find balance between the internal and external mechanisms that effect thinking and behavior. S*elf-mechanisms* (perceptions, attitudes, abilities) become self-limiting. The reality is that human capacity is limited to self-perceptions and individual abilities are constrained by physical limitations as well as perceptions. Bandura observes, "Skills can be easily over-ruled by self-doubts, so that even highly talented individuals make poor use of their capabilities under circumstances that undermine their beliefs in themselves" (p. 37).

But should self-efficacious behaviors be only about self-mechanisms? Humans free themselves from self-mechanisms as they develop external connections that tap into other sources of efficacy. These can be collective efficacy, organizational efficacy, and what has become known as workplace spirituality. The latter suggest a domain of *God-efficacy* is possible, or at least the term workplace spirituality can have the added meaning of *spiritual-efficacy*. If self-efficacy refers to perceptions of self-capabilities, spiritual-efficacy would refer

to spiritual capabilities, and God-efficacy thus refers to the perceptions about the capabilities of God.

However, self-efficacious behaviors should not be framed as how one finds strength based on perceptions of self alone. Should self-centeredness be construed as efficacious behavior when in reality most individuals live within the context of a social dynamic? People behave based on how they perceive themselves in relation to others. This generalization does not speak to the issue of anti-social psychopaths, but to normal functioning. Efficacy, as perception, simply refers to a system of beliefs, but beliefs about self must take into account the normality of individuals seeing themselves in relationships which others that factor into perceptions about personal strength. Individuals live in a world of comparison from which they measure their own strengths and weaknesses.

Is being superman really possible? Individual potential at some point must be limited to realities, regardless of perceptions, wishes, and wants. The strongest man of earth will have a maximum lift, so physical potential is limited. No individual can leap over tall buildings with a single bound, unless assisted by some mechanical or extra-human means. When speaking about *human potential* the discourse is really about what a person can do in the context of individual capabilities making use of all the resources available for the task at hand. This means knowing how to use personal capability in tandem with the "M" list of available resources: men, money, materials, and methods. These are the things necessary for getting things done, whether at the individual or organizational level. Individual or collective potential always requires external resources and external connectivity.

One of the answers to self-limiting perceptions and behaviors is suggested in the role of spirituality that tends to counter perceptions of weakness, anxiety, or failure. Workplace spirituality is associated with motivation, inspiration, positive affect, and hopefulness. For some, workplace spirituality is considered a *values-framework* and for others a *religious framework*, but the existence of spirituality in the workplace is assumed based on perceptions about harmony, resilience, ethical behaviors, and inter-connectedness of the workplace community. It is characterized by "an [sic "an" added] Individuals' drive to experience transcendence, or a deeper meaning to life, through the way in which they live and work" (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003, p. 87). Duggleby, Cooper and Penz (2009) contend that workplace spirituality is associated with a sense of spiritual well-being that fosters a condition of hope which is linked to empowerment, thus to self-efficacy (p. 2377).

Workplace spirituality, however, is not easily defined. Marie (2011) notes a definition by Marques (2008) as "an experience of interconnectedness and trust among those involved in the work process . . ." (p. 53). Smith (2006) contends workplace spirituality "refers to the ways we express our spirituality at work" (Marie, p. 53). For some, spirituality is a human characteristic that may or may not be religious in nature (Benefiel, 2005, p. 9). Others contend spirituality is associated with religious beliefs, including both traditional and "new age" forms of religion (Marie, 2011, p. 53). Grant, O'Neil, and Stephens (2004) quote Wuthnow stating, "Wuthnow defines spirituality, as we would also, as consisting of 'all beliefs and activities by which individuals attempt to relate their lives to a divine being or some other concept of transcendent reality" (p. 268).

While definitions of workplace spirituality are ill-defined, theorist should ask "Why are people drawn to religious experiences" and compare those answers to what can be known about

life in the workplace.   Life is full of troubles both on and off the job. Spirituality is about perceptions, values, and beliefs associated with living above difficulties in life, having a sense of goodness, having resilience and hope, and having harmonious relationships. Harlan (2012) quotes Pascale and Athos (1981) stating, "there are spiritual values that provide a 'spiritual fabric' (p. 73) for relationships within organizations, and these values include fairness, harmony and cooperation, struggle for betterment, courtesy and humility, adjustment and assimilation, and gratitude" (p. 92). The same needs that induce religious spirituality may incline individuals less religious toward spiritual behaviors that creates the perception known as workplace spirituality. The attributes of spirituality are exhibited in the religious and non-religious as results desired in and by the human spirit in answer to basic needs of life.

Literature review

Why is workplace spirituality a matter of discussion? Grant et al. (2004) write, "We believe that the workplace is one of the most important setting in which people come together daily to accomplish what they cannot do on their own, that is, to realize their full potential as human beings" (p. 266). Human endeavor in the workplace is impacted by two great life domains, one being the domain associated with the conditions of work, including environment, economics, and tasks; the second is the domain of relationships and connectedness. While the second is certainly a part of the workplace environment, relationships have special meaning because they are more likely to have greater impact beyond the workplace. One preacher astutely noted, "Relationships are the only thing you take to heaven with you".

The full potential of human beings is never-the-less subjective in nature; no one knows what that is. The biblical account in the Tower of Babel story reveals a divine assessment that when people are unified and are able to fully communicate with one another "nothing will be

restrained from them, which they have imaged to do" (Genesis 11:6, KJV). All domains of work are about human potential. "You can be whatever you want to be" sounds good but is far from reality. Perhaps everyone who desires to be a doctor could be a doctor, but being given the resources to become a doctor based on attaining the degree, does not establish potential, only achievement. A doctor trained in the United States has different criteria than a doctor in the Dominican Republic. The cliché is meant to inspire and motivate but motivation and inspiration depend on perceptions of self-efficacy.

What is less limiting is collective human potential. A lesson learned from the Tower of Babel account is that human potential is the greatest when it is part of a unified endeavor to build together with others. The biblical account suggests negatives because the purpose for the Tower was in contradiction to God's commandment to replenish the earth. Instead, mankind wanted to build a one-world government and a one-world religion, neither of which was pleasing to God. The whole of humanity is represented in the story, because they were not dispersed throughout the world, and they cried, "Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven, and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (Genesis 11:4, KJV). God's intention was that the world was to be populated and the cry "lest we be scattered" was contrary to God's wish.

Human potential, therefore, is most often associated with work related endeavor in the context of relationships. It is most commonly a social function. The role of work is significant because it occupies a major portion of human activity. It is commonly a part of self-identity and provides the basis for career development, education, and choices about the future. Even more important is the social stigmas associated with work. People are identified in terms of success, status, and social groups based on occupation or orientation toward work activities. A person

can be "on welfare"; "a professional"; lower, middle, or upper class; industrious or lazy; important or unimportant — social perceptions which are directly or indirectly related to concepts of work or lack of work. What a person *is* becomes synonymous with what a person *does*. A person can *be* what a person does, if they so choose. Because so much significance is attached to work related human endeavors, it is impossible to detach one's culture, values, and beliefs from an individual's realm of work without damaging the meaning of life for the individual. The nature and significance of work suggest that a great deal of efficacious behavior is centered in work related activities which makes up the greatest portion of our lives.

Collective and organizational efficacy. While Bandura (1997) observes that self-efficacy is beliefs related to the capabilities of self, efficacy can describe perceptions about the potential of others in the context of capabilities, activities, and empowerment. Bandura asked, "Do efficacy beliefs operate as causal factors in human functioning" (p. 54)? Efficacy beliefs can involve comparison with others which may alter or influence beliefs about self. Self-efficacy can be intertwined with collective efficacy, as in the case of team sports or work teams. An individual member can be motivated by the overall perception of the team in which the member participates. Bandura writes, "Perceived collective efficacy is defined as a group's shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainment" (p. 475). Self-efficacy is enhanced by the collective spirit, attitudes, and capabilities. Personal ability is still important, but potential may not be realized because it becomes part of the cumulative efficacy.

Efficacy is about perception and perceptions differ based on culture and context. There are individualistic cultures and collective cultures and this effects both individual and collective perception. Social views can change the way individuals contribute efficacious behavior, based

on cultural expectations. Bandura (1997) writes, "Individualists expected better self-evaluative and other outcomes for performing well independently than for performing well in a group; collectivist expected better outcomes for contributing to accomplishments of an in-group team than for performing well on their own or in a team of out-group members" (p. 470).

Implications exist when contrasting self-efficacy with collective efficacy. For example, there is a possible change of focus, as in how coaches view individual and team performance in a game of basketball. A basketball coach, a good one, will push for *both* the individual and team potential. Team shooting is only as good as individual shooting, so both are required in practice. A team supervisor on the job, however, may have greater focus on team potential and ignore the *weakest link*, choosing to accommodate lesser individual potential by building greater team synergy. Human potential, thus self-efficacy, is impacted by the presence of others in many ways.

Defining the workplace. Is it possible that defining workplace spirituality has been hindered by social confusion over defining the workplace? The workplace is more than a place where people draw a paycheck; it is a place where people fulfill "life". Unfortunately, society tends to define the workplace by the former, not by the latter. A stay at home mother or wife, if she so chooses, makes her home her life's work and her "workplace". The family farm did not separate the work in the house from the work in the field into different life domains: both mattered in the fulfillment of life. Many professionals have unstaffed or minimally staffed offices for the workplace, while others work from a seat on the plane. What of the taxi cab driver who spends very little time in dispatch office? The workplace is not about the "place", it is about the work that goes on, whatever that may be. While the "place", as a physical location,

impacts how work is carried out, what connects an individual to work is determined by the *meaningfulness* in terms of self-esteem, achievement, accomplishment, and reward.

However, while self-efficacy and workplace spirituality can be discussed in the context of the individual, the greater emphasis for today is in the context of the 21st century workplace where human potential is challenged by globalization, technology, and changing needs for the workforce outside of the home. Work in general is a social function where exchanges are made, relationships are required, and seldom result in a realm of isolation. The writer at home may write for pleasure, but while it requires effort, it would not be viewed in the context of being an occupation unless profit is involved. Such is the context of the social function of work in contrast to hobbies or pleasure activities. It typically involves others.

Efficacy in the workplace. The job satisfaction as a result of any form of work depends on a sense of well-being by an individual in terms of the afore-mentioned self-esteem (or self-efficacy), achievement, accomplishments, and rewards; but also in terms of connectedness, collective-efficacy, and organizational efficacy. Efficacy is related to potential, but it is not about the ability or potential; it is about the perception of ability. It is based in the concept of motivation and resilience that is associated with hope. Schneller and Vandsburger (2008) observe that while self-efficacy refers to a person's belief about his or her ability to execute a specific course of action, it "includes the belief that a chosen action will produce a positive change" (p. 79). It is related to motivation, the ability to resolve social concerns, and the ability to select, organize, and use information in self-fulfilling ways. Schneller and Vandsburger sees self-efficacy "as an internal resiliency resource" that provides a framework for handling stress in life's "largely uncharted territory" (p. 88).

Discussion

      Self-efficacy and workplace spirituality have a common denominator: they are based on perceptions grounded in cultural or social belief systems. Common to both is the notion that efficacy and spirituality are associated with how individuals respond to obstacles and challenges to life needs. Living life to the fullest, having meaningful outcomes, overcoming barriers and difficulties — all depend on our perception of our placement in the *wheel of life*. All humans have a self-centric view where they are a hub, with all relationships and all circumstances being spokes that connect one to the wheel of life that moves them in one direction. If things are "working" the direction is good in-spite of the bumps in the road. The biggest danger to contend with is the "broken spokes" where connection and relationship creates weakness in the wheel of life.

      Efficacy unlimited. Self-efficacy is related to the hub and is at the center of the wheel of life. Efficacious behavior is not limited to perceptions of self, but includes perceptions of the efficacy of others in relation to self. Individuals compare themselves with others in terms of strengths or weaknesses, and use this as a measurement of their own strengths and weaknesses. People tend to add meaning to their own capabilities in terms of better, worse, or equal to the capabilities of others and these perceptions can motivate and inspire, or they can have either positive or negative effects. People can alter efficacious behaviors by adapting to efficacy inputs of others.

      Efficacy and human potential can never be fully understood in the narrow context of self. Bandura (1997) observes, "There is a major difference between the potential environment and the actual environment" (p. 163). The potential environment is a broadening of agency to include the potential of others. Before God intervened, the Tower of Babel was a possibility, and

while the phrase "whose top may reach unto heaven" was in keeping with the understanding of the time, the reality of *skyscraper* in our modern world proves that efficacy and human potential are greater than self.

God-efficacy. A humanist worldview limits the discussions of efficacy, potential, and spirituality as human agency with the deception that humans are therefore unlimited in their capabilities as long as human relationships have strong connectivity and harmony. The importance of workplace spirituality as a theoretical interest is that indeed people achieve more when there is unity, harmony, and resilience. Just as collective efficacy or organizational efficacy can be the cumulative effect of self-efficacy, workplace spirituality is the result of individual nurturing of the spiritual conditions in the workplace. There is no spirituality in inanimate objects, much to the chagrin of animist. An animist construct of spirituality is rare and no examples found for this literature review of workplace spirituality.

Sadly, much of the literature concerning workplace spirituality strives to minimize the religious context of spirituality while acknowledging that religion is a major source of such spirituality. The concept that a divine being, such as God, is a perception based in faith is viewed simply as a perception. The construct advances the suggestion that perception is not based in reality when it comes to the possibility of a God efficacy, but can be based in reality when it comes to self-efficacy; religion is not reality, it is ideology.

The literature on God-efficacy is difficult to find outside of the context of religious literature. However, statements attributing efficacious behavior to God are the reason for the debates that make workplace spirituality difficult to define. Marie (2011) states,

As mentioned earlier, spirituality in the workplace must respect personal religious views in a non-threatening environment. While most literature indicated the importance of separating religion and spirituality, "spirituality is 'interpreted', and consequently, defined under the influence of the worldviews implied by specific religions, cultural and philosophical traditions" (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2007, p. 581). For some individuals, separating the concepts of spirituality and religion is difficult, if not impossible. As a result, some employees may feel marginalized because of their religious viewpoints. (p. 59)

For many, religion and spirituality are synonymous and the implication is that attempts to marginalize the religious aspects of workplace spirituality ignore the reality that the increase of spirituality in the workplace is the result of people attempting to live out their faith. Von Bergen (2013) notes the increasing amount of religious discriminations filing with the EEOC, "up 13 percent from 2006 and double the number in 1992" (p. 113). Von Bergen cites Miller (2007) stating, "Such endeavors have variously been called 'spirituality and work, spirituality in the workplace, God and work, soul at work, religion in the workplace, God and business, and faith in the workplace" (Miller, 2007, p. 14)(p. 112).

While non-religious individuals may attribute spiritual behavior to self-spirituality, normal attribution to God for strength or talent is common among those that are ideologically religious. Whether or not God is real is not the issue, but if efficacy is a perception, God-efficacy is the perception of those who are religious.

The testimony of God-efficacy is evidenced throughout the scriptures. Paul wrote, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13, KJV). Moses wrote, "The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation" (Exodus 15:2, KJV). Samuel wrote, "God is my strength and power: and he maketh my way perfect" (2 Samuel 22:33, KJV). There more than enough references to God's efficacy both in and out of religious literature that serves as personal testimony to this one fact: not all people perceive self-efficacy as their source of strength or talent.

Conclusion

The implication is that there is no need to prove or disprove the existence of God in a discussion of workplace spirituality. Spirituality is frame of reference for how individuals perceive their source of strength and capabilities, and to what they attribute their values. Spiritual actions take place in the context of relationships and circumstances where the self is but the center of life and whatever relationships (spokes) are present make a difference in how the wheel rides through life's circumstances. Those spokes of relationship include family, friends, co-workers, educators, employers, and for many God. As each spoke is removed, the wheel becomes weaker. Self-efficacy that exists at the center hub is impacted by any broken relationship. Could there be a danger to self-efficacy if God-efficacy is replaced by something else; perhaps by spirituality *sans the divine presence of God*?

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