Implications of Spiritual Leadership on Organizations

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Introduction

A focus on the aspect of spirituality as it relates to various leadership approaches in private and public businesses and institutions provides an opportunity for consideration. While leaders have had a focus on providing a leadership style that cultivated productivity for the purpose of the organization only, the concept of a leadership style that promotes motivating and inspiring employees through the nourishment and cultivating of one's self as an individual who fits into the organization is one that is trending. This phenomenon is known as spiritual leadership. The idea of spirituality in the workplace is not a new one. Patricia Aburdene, author of *Megatrends 2010*, claimed that the idea of spirituality in the workplace has grown with such rapid popularity that it stands as the greatest megatrend of today. However, research in the area of spiritual leadership remains in its infancy due to the lack of common understanding of the concept and boundaries that are unclear between workplace spirituality and leadership (Dent, Higgins, & Wharf, 2005). Fry and Slocum (2007) stated that "spiritual leadership involves motivating and inspiring workers through a transcendent vision and a corporate culture based on altruistic values to produce a highly motivated, committed, and productive workforce" (p.90). This type of leadership taps into an employee's need to connect, to be intrinsically motivated, and satisfy the needs of spiritual well-being through calling and membership (Fry, Hannah, Noel, &Walumbwa, 2011). Spiritual leadership has been acknowledged as a new genre of leadership theory dedicated to a more value-oriented approach (Aviolo et al., 2009). Although most research studies focus on spiritual leadership in the business world, there are emerging studies that focus on the impact of spiritual leadership and its application to a wide range of educational areas such as educational leadership, practice, and teaching (Gibson, 2011).

The need for spiritual leadership is evident and even well-established in the social and physical sciences where research has shown that individuals have the drive and the motivation to find meaning in their work and become a member of an organization where they feel valued (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003). Fry (2003) explained that individuals spend the majority of their time at work and are eating, exercising, dating, and even napping at the organization. Therefore, the need to feel a part of this organization is vital. This need for spirituality in the workplace is related to the need to find solutions for the problems with modern society and is influenced by holistic philosophies and shifts in the scientific paradigm (Crossman, 2003). Additional research has indicated that there are tangible benefits from using a spiritual approach including improving morale, reducing stress and turnover, and even improving performance, new income, and stock price at the organizational level (Crossman, 2003). Nelson (2008) pointed out that spiritual leadership can actually help employees find vision, value, meaningful work, and set specific goals for themselves. Thus, the idea of a workplace that is driven by spiritual leadership should be appealing to organizations and educational institutions.

Spirituality vs. Religion

Although the idea of spiritual leadership is gaining in popularity and understanding, a common misconception exists between the terms *religion* and *spirituality* due to the fact that the two words have been historically linked with one another. Hill et al. (2000) defined religion as adhering to a system of beliefs and practices that are associated with a tradition and community in which members agree on what is believed and practiced.

Spirituality was conversely defined as a general feeling of closeness to that which is sacred (Hill et al., 2000). Fry and Slocum (2007) extended the definition by stating that "religion is concerned with a system of beliefs, ritual prayers, rites, and ceremonies and related formalized practices and ideas" (p.90). Spirituality is more concerned with qualities such as love, compassion, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, contentment, personal responsibility, and harmony (Fry & Slocum, 2007). The Dalai Lama (1999) explained that *religion* is concerned with the claims of one faith tradition in which the follower is accepted into some form of heaven or nirvana, while *spirituality* is concerned with the qualities of human spirit such as love, compassion, tolerance, and forgiveness. Many researchers caution leaders on viewing spirituality through the lens of religion because doing so can divide the workplace instead of bringing it together. Fry and Slocum (2007) warned about using the religious view that there is only one path to God and salvation by pointing out that this view excludes those who do not share this particular belief. The failure to separate religion from spirituality in the workplace can offend employees as well as decrease morale and employee well-being (Fry & Slocum, 2007). Though many people experience their religion through spirituality, not all individuals do (Worthington, Hook, Davis, & McDaniel, 2011). The Dalai Lama (1999) further explained that "religion is something we can perhaps do without. What we can't do without are these basic spiritual qualities" (p.22).It is noted that most literature on spiritual leadership comes from the field of religion and theology, though spiritual leadership can be a separate idea that does not embrace religious theory (Sendjaya, 2007). Ultimately, it is up to the leader to decide how the two ideas will be intertwined or separated.

Fry's Spiritual Leadership Model

Examining the concept of spiritual leadership without acknowledging the contributions made by Fry would be difficult if not impossible. Fry's (2003) model of spiritual leadership is widely accepted and used among scholars across the globe. Fry's (2003) essential keys to spiritual leadership include creating a *vision* where leaders and followers feel a sense of *calling* so that their lives have meaning coupled with *hope/faith* and establishing a social/organizational culture based on *altruistic love* where the leaders and followers feel a sense of *membership*. Altruistic love includes things like trust/loyalty, forgiveness/acceptance, gratitude, integrity, honesty, courage, humility, kindness, compassion, patience/meekness, and endurance. Through this model of spiritual leadership, the leaders and followers are both understood and appreciated along with have care, concern, and appreciation for themselves and others. When leaders use a spiritual approach that encompasses a vision coupled with hope and faith with a focus on meaning/calling and show altruistic love that fosters membership, the outcome is an increase in organizational commitment and productivity (Fry, 2003). Ultimately, Fry (2003) proposed that the:"Ultimate effect of spiritual leadership is to bring together a sense of fusion among the four fundamental forces of human existence (body, mind, heart, and spirit) so that people are motivated for high performance, have increased organizational commitment, and personally experience joy, peace, and serenity" (p.718).

Spiritual Leadership and Organizational Effectiveness

An examination of research on spiritual leadership and its potential impact on organizations indicates a leadership approach that emphasizes spiritual well-being in the workplace produces beneficial personal and organizational outcomes (Eisler & Montouri, 2003). Fry et al. (2011) supported this research by explaining that spiritual leadership facilitates the "emergence of unit trust, intrinsic motivation, and organizational commitment which is necessary to positively influence unit performance" (p.263). Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003) mirrored previous findings by indicating that spiritual leadership in the workplace not only leads to personal outcomes of increased joy, peace, job satisfaction, and commitment, but also delivers improved productivity and reduces absenteeism and turnover.

Fry and Slocum (2007) conducted research on company owned wholesale distributors measuring organizational commitment and productivity along with calling/meaning, membership, and the elements of spiritual leadership (vision, faith, hope, and altruistic love). Findings indicated that 13% of distributor sales growth could be explained by meaning/calling and membership along with 94% of employee commitment to a company and 73% of distributor productivity. These findings suggest that if companies sustained spiritual leadership, there would be an increase in sales growth. This gives companies a significant competitive advantage. Perhaps that is why many companies have applied spiritual leadership in their organizations. Frisdiantara and Sahertian (2012) highlighted that Dilmah Tea, Amway, Tom's Maine, Ford, and Southwest Airlines use a framework of spiritual leadership.

These organizations respond to spiritual needs in various ways including applying yoga, fengshui, and taichi as part of a stress management program along with inviting spiritual professionals to counsel the employees in many cases. While many scholars continue to argue that spirituality and business cannot coexist because the purposes are quite different, spiritual leadership has the potential to become an innovative, courageous, and beneficial way to manage individuals in the 21st century (Frisdiantara & Sahertian, 2012).

Spiritual Leadership and Leadership Effectiveness

There is little argument that the effectiveness of a leader in any organization or educational institution plays a significant role in its success. The role of the spiritual leader is of the upmost importance in creating a culture that promotes spiritual well-being in its followers. Reave (2005) concluded that spiritual values and practices are directly connected to leadership effectiveness in motivating employees, creating a positive climate, inspiring trust, promoting positive relationships between employees and the leader, and achieving goals of the organization. Yaghoubi, Moloudi, and Banihashemi (2010) echoed these findings by indicating that spiritual leaders develop committed and motivated employees by creating spiritual insights and cultural contexts that are aligned with universal human values. Dent, Higgins, and Wharff (2005) proposed a clear consistency between spiritual values and practices and leadership effectiveness. Fairholm (2011) noted that employees, under a leader who demonstrates spiritual leadership become happier, are more committed to work, and develop a stronger sense of calling. Godwin (2014) extended this knowledge by explaining that employees become more productive within the organization when spiritual leaders encourage commitment, empowerment, and collaboration.

Considering the above mentioned literature on the positive role that spiritual leaders can have on employees and organizational performance in general, it is easy to see how choosing the right leader to uphold the spiritual values of the organization is a key to incorporating spirituality in the workplace. More research is needed on the incorporation of spiritual leadership into the workplace as well as how to become a spiritual leader. However, research indicates that when organizations are able to implement spiritual leadership in the workplace and choose a leader who is deeply committed to the concept, positive outcomes are accomplished.

Spiritual Leadership and Education

The focus on spirituality in 21st century education is relatively new even though the concept can be found in ancient civilizations and cultures. However, interest in aspects of spirituality in education has ignited over the past two decades (Gibson, 2011). Perhaps the reason it has taken so long for spirituality to be at the heart of education has to do with the common misconception that religion and spirituality are one in the same. Because of the principle of separation of church and state, as stated in the First Amendment of the United States Constitution, leaders perhaps have avoided the idea of a leadership model that encompasses spirituality. However, Dent, Higgins, and Wharf (2005) explained that "if we ignore the issues of spirituality, we are abrogating our responsibilities at educational leaders to provide the spiritual care that constitutes one of the essential rights of an individual who comes to our public education system" (p.642).

When looking at studies that have examined spiritual leadership and school principals, Gibson (2011) found that teachers' perspectives regarding spirituality in theprincipal ship were more influential through the quality of the character of the principal rather than the policies or the position of authority. This means that when individuals perceive their leaders to be spiritual in nature and reflect that through their quality of character, followers see that as an influential factor. Additional findings were that teachers reported positive emotional and professional effects to having a principal who was a spiritual leader.

These findings complement the findings of Riaz (2012) in a study conducted among school principals which discovered that there was a positive relationship between school principals who described themselves as spiritual and transformational leadership dimensions that include idealized influence attributed, idealized influence behaviors, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation. This research suggested that spiritual leadership is significantly related to transformational leadership; a leadership style that is considered highly attractive to most educational institutions. Conducting more research on the link between spirituality and transformational leadership could be key to integrating more qualities of spirituality into the education realm. Fry (2003) concluded that spiritual leadership is necessary for the transformation and continued success of learning organizations.

Guidelines for Incorporating Spiritual Leadership into Organizations

Though research on spiritual leadership is clearly still emerging, there is little doubt that this form of leadership contains desirable qualities in which many organizations might consider.For those companies with an interest in spiritual leadership, there are a few guidelines that must be considered when determining how to incorporate this style of leadership into the organization as a whole. First, organizations must have a "clear and compelling vision of where they want to be in the near to distant future" (Fry, 2003, p.718). This vision should portray a journey that will give followers a sense of calling, of one's life having meaning, and making a difference. It should get followers excited about coming to work and give meaning to that work so that followers leave feeling more committed to the organization than ever. This vision should reflect high ideals that encourage both faith and hope in followers (Fry, 2003).

Second, organizations must have a culture that is aligned with that of a spiritual leadership framework. This culture must embody the idea of altruistic love that provides both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. The culture of spiritual leadership is one in which leaders and followers share responsibility. Ideas can come from anywhere and followers can become self-directed and empowered teams that replace vertical structures and functional boundaries (Fry, 2003). The culture becomes one where power is delegated to this enlightened team in which followers understand how their jobs are relevant to the organization's performance and vision/mission. Team members in this type of culture are challenged to persevere and do what it takes in order to meet challenging goals through hope and faith in the vision of the organization, their leaders, and themselves. The participation in these team efforts manifests followers who experience a sense of membership through recognition and celebration and who feel understood and appreciated (Fry, 2003).

Lastly, organizations must choose a leader who walks in front of one when someone needs to follow, behind one when someone needs encouragement, and beside one when someone needs a friend (Fry, 2003). Since this leader is at the heart of the vision and culture of the organization, perhaps this is the most vital step. Spiritual leaders are people who are often considered to be inspirational, visionary, and can move beyond barriers and limitations (Sikula & Sikula, 2005). These leaders concentrate on higher-order needs and try to build inspirational involvement of followers into the organization. "Spiritual leaders are proactive leaders who can change the way that others see and act" (Frisdiantara & Sahertian, 2012, p.284). This means that spiritual leaders can build trust and compassion in the organization. Spiritual leaders are people with the ability to take a backseat to being in charge and build teams of people who collectively share leadership responsibilities. Finally, spiritual leaders are more motivated by the need to make a difference instead of simply making a living.

Conclusion

Spiritual leadership has reemerged as a focus of leadership that remains somewhat in its infancy as researchers strive to define its constructs. Although the idea of spiritual leadership is still emerging, many organizations are employing this type of leadership and are seeing increases in productivity, employee satisfaction, employee commitment, and financial gains. While the idea of spirituality has traditionally been avoided due to the misconception that it is the same as religion, emerging research indicates that a leadership style which focuses on the spiritual well-being of both followers and leaders leads to positive outcomes for both. Organizations that choose to use this form of leadership must transform the vision and culture of their work as well as choose an appropriate leader. More research is needed on the constructs of spiritual leadership as emerging trends indicate.

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