

Spirituality and the Practice of Educational Leadership

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The recent work of Lewis Fry and Yochanan Altman (2013) reminds us there are conceptualizations of effective organizational leadership independent of top-down, command, and control principles. In their book, *Spiritual Leadership in Action* (2013), Fry and Altman describe the transformation of a complex, modern business organization through the application of leadership practices derived from emerging research into a spiritual workplace. Fry and Altman's study is one of several recent works that address changes in how corporations may be restructured from the dominant, rational and bureaucratic model, dependent upon a command-and-control style of leadership, into a new form having less to do with enforcing rules and keeping order and more to do with finding meaning, purpose, and community in the workplace (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Fry, 2003; Pfeffer, 2003). Leadership practices that derive from spiritual influences in the workplace include recognizing employees have inner lives they bring with them to work; endowing work with a sense of broad social value and calling; and fostering an organizational culture that builds a network of connectedness and belonging among employees.

Ashmos and Duchon (2000) trace the growing interest in spirituality in the work environment to several factors. First, the rash of corporate downsizing, re-engineering, employee layoffs, and the movement of jobs off-shore that marked the 1990s have resulted in a demoralized workforce and a growing inequality in wages (Brandt, 1996). Second, with the decline of neighborhoods, churches, civic groups, and extended families many people have come to perceive the workplace as their primary source for community and link to people. The workplace then becomes the setting where the human need for connection to a broader community is met (Conger & Kanungo, 1994). Third, Brandt (1996) and Conger and Kanungo (1994) suggest that, as the baby-boomer generation ages, interest grows in contemplating life's meaning and its inevitable end. Finally, expanding global competition has led corporate leaders to recognize employees' imagination and creativity need more

outlets and opportunity for expression within the workplace. But releasing creativity is difficult in environments where work is tightly controlled and spirituality is not considered meaningful (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). A workplace shaped by spiritual values offers one possible response to challenges in a changing work environment.

In this paper we offer a definition of “spirituality,” provide a limited review of the emerging research on spirituality in the workplace, and describe two models of leadership that incorporate spirituality. We first present a general introduction to spiritual leadership, especially as it pertains to the workplace. We proceed then to a description of two spiritual leadership models drawn from the literature, including issues related to religion and the ethics of spiritual leadership. Finally, we argue the relevance of spiritual leadership for those who lead public schools.

Defining Spirituality

Spirituality is a broad term with no clearly agreed-upon definition. Proffered definitions of spirituality run the gamut around man’s search for meaning. For example, Cacioppe (2000) conceptualizes spirituality as the search for a meaning, a value, or a purpose for one’s life and work. Ellison (1983), too, considers spirituality as part of humanity’s ongoing quest for meaning and purpose embodied in a super-rational being or a force greater than the self. Fullan (2002) writes that spirituality involves identification of a moral purpose for our lives that connects principled behavior to something greater than we are. Mitroff and Denton (1999) equate spirituality with one’s effort to live an integrated rather than compartmentalized existence. Houston and Sokolow (2006) posit spirituality requires a person make a concerted effort to go outside the self to locate that part of the human being that is more than material and, once found, provides a connection to the infinite. Mayes (2001) defines spirituality as “the pursuit of a trans-personal and trans-temporal reality that serves as the ontological ground for an ethic of compassion and service” (p. 6). Finally, Beazley (1997) holds spirituality consists of a faith relationship with a transcendent power that lies beyond and is independent of the material universe. Broadly then, the term “spirituality” refers to an individual’s search for meaning, purpose, and value in an integrated life connected to the transcendent and infinite, that engenders a commitment to an idea or cause greater than the self, and provides the foundation for an ethic of compassion and service to others. We employ this understanding of spirituality as we unfold our argument.

Spiritual Leadership’s Core Concepts

Models of spiritual leadership share certain core concepts and ideas. Patterson (2003) identifies seven “virtuous constructs” that “work in a

processional pattern” (p. 2) to shape Servant Leadership. These concepts are agapo love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service. Fry (2003) identifies the essential qualities of Spiritual Leadership as vision, altruistic love, and hope/faith. To these qualities he adds the human need for “spiritual survival.” Although the essential characteristics of spiritual leadership vary to some degree, there are commonalities. Our understanding of spiritual leadership merges concepts from Patterson’s (2003) and Fry’s (2003) theories to isolate qualities and values we maintain are essential to spiritual leadership. These key concepts include vision, altruistic love, humility, service, and spiritual survival. We argue combining concepts from these specific models results in a more complete understanding of spiritual leadership: one that can be put to use in schools.

Spirituality and the Workplace

There is an emerging interest in the influence of spirituality in the workplace and a rising number of scholars at work on the topic (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Biberman, 2003; Fite, Reardon, & Boone 2011; Fry, 2003; Fry & Altman, 2013; Gotsis & Kortezi 2007; Pfeffer, 2003; Phipps, 2012). Christian, Essounga-Njan, and Morgan-Thomas (2011) posit: “Spiritual matters, although personal to many people, are now a matter of public discourse, particularly as it pertains to the workplace” (p. 1258). Phipps (2012) offers a framework that connects individual spiritual beliefs and strategic decision-making in an organization. He notes that although conversations about religion and spirituality involve matters of private belief they are relevant to the workplace because employees bring their innermost beliefs with them to the workplace. Dolan and Altman (2012) agree, urging employers and employees to move beyond silence on spiritual matters because:

...[a] spiritually friendly workplace respects people’s deepest beliefs, allows and encourages them to wear their faiths (including non-faith) on their sleeves and incorporate these values in what they do and how they go about their work, giving expression—a voice—to their innermost values. (p. 27)

Spirituality in the workplace is about people

...experiencing a sense of purpose and meaning in their work beyond the kind of meaning found...in the job design literature, which emphasizes finding meaning in the performance of tasks [and] experiencing a sense of connectedness to one another and to their workplace community. (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000, p. 135)

Workplace spirituality is about nourishing employees’ inner selves at work.

Certain questions confront researchers who study spirituality in the workplace (Kahnweiler & Otte, 1997; Sass, 2000). For example, should researchers assume one's inner life is qualitatively different in the workplace than in other settings? Furthermore, can workplace spirituality be considered an aggregate of personal values and, if so, which values are to be included in incorporating spirituality into the workplace? Finally, is workplace spirituality an individual or collective phenomenon (Giacalone & Jurkeiwicz, 2010)? Giacalone and Jurkeiwicz (2010) urge research into workplace spirituality become integrated into the broader research agenda on organizational behavior and organizational performance. Ashmos & Duchon (2000) suggest research into workplace spirituality be grounded upon three assumptions: employees possess an inner life; employees have a need to find work meaningful in ways that go beyond the mundane concerns of everyday living; and a commitment to serve others provides employees with a context for spiritual growth. These assumptions establish the parameters for research into workplace spirituality.

Several scholars (Chandler, Holden, & Kolander, 1992; Neck & Millman, 1994; Paloutzain & Kirkpatrick, 1995; Trott, 1996) identify practical, work-related aspects of spirituality. There are indications that spirituality in the workplace affects employees' initiative, strengthens motivation, encourages teamwork, and improves employees' commitment to the organization. Spirituality in the workplace may also influence long-term behavioral change in employees. Kolodinsky, Giacalone, and Jurkeiwicz (2008) note organizational spirituality is positively related to employee job-involvement, to employee identification with the organization, and to work-rewards satisfaction. Finally, research by Reich (1981), Freeman (1994), and Himmelfarb (1994) conclude a spiritual culture in the workplace tends to make workers more productive. Research also suggests leaders who view their work as a spiritual endeavor lead their organizations to higher levels of performance and accomplishment. Restructuring the workplace to support employees' need for meaning, purpose, and connection requires fundamental changes in how leaders act and interact with followers.

Two Models of Spiritual Leadership

Here we present two visions of spiritual leadership relevant to all categories of organizations, including educational organizations. These visions are servant leadership, based on the original work of Robert Greenleaf (1977), and a theory of spiritual leadership developed by Louis W. Fry (2003, 2005).

Servant leadership is grounded in interpretation of the New Testament and in the extensive writing of Robert K. Greenleaf (1977) who asserts the primary purpose of leadership is service to followers.

The servant leader [is] servant first.... [Leadership] begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is leader...perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions.... The leader first and the servant first are two extreme types [of leadership]. (p. 13)

The difference between the leader-as-servant first or leader-as-leader first lies within how the leader determines to meet the needs of others. Servant leadership is about facilitating how followers accomplish shared objectives through enabling individual development, empowerment, and collaboration in an environment designed to promote the health and welfare of followers. Servant leaders assist those who are being led become “healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become leaders” (Greenleaf, 1977, pp. 13–14). The measure of effective servant leadership is how well followers grow in autonomy and become leaders themselves. Greenleaf’s approach to leadership is unique and value-based. The primary value on which servant leadership is based is the leader seeks not her or his own recognition or power, but the opportunity to create a social architecture that benefits those for whom the organization is responsible. Warren Bennis (2004) writes servant leadership provides “a counter balance to the glorification, deification, and lionization of leaders who have...neglected or forgotten why they are there: to serve the people who are affected by the organization” (p. xii). This is why servant leadership matters. Nair (1994) reinforces the need for the desire to serve others to remain central to the concept of servant leadership. He writes,

As long as power dominates our thinking about leadership, we cannot move toward a higher standard of leadership. We must place service at the core; for even though power will always be associated with leadership, it has only one legitimate use: service. (p. 59)

The need to exercise power does not motivate the servant leader.

Patterson (2003) theorizes servant leadership is characterized by the focus a servant leader has on his or her followers. The leader’s behaviors and attitudes flow from this focus on followers. The priority focus on followers’ needs and development makes servant leadership unique and different from transformational leadership, where the primary focus is on the organization and its objectives (Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2003). Moreover, servant leadership is a “virtuous” theory, wherein virtue is defined as a “qualitative characteristic” embedded in the leader’s character (Patterson, 2003, p. 2). As a virtuous leader, the servant leader

attempts to do what is right in any given situation (Kennedy, 1995). The desire to do what is right for the long-term welfare of followers gives direction and purpose to the servant leader's actions.

Patterson (2003) argues the servant leader considers phenomena not usually addressed by other leadership theories, e.g. service to others, agapao love, and humility. Agapao love, derived from the Greek term meaning moral love, is the cornerstone of the servant/follower relationship, referring to a leader's desire to "do the right thing at the right time and for the right reasons" (p. 12). Agapao love is "love in the moral or social sense" (p. 3), for servant leaders truly appreciate followers and care for their people (Russell & Stone, 2002). Humility is also an important underpinning of servant leadership. Humility protects the servant leader from hubris and the tendency to overestimate his or her own importance to the organization compared to that of his or her followers. To remain humble means the servant leader acts in moderation, listens to the advice of others, and realizes the ethical use of power means rejecting command-and-control types of behavior in favor of trust-building and empowerment (Harrison, 2002). Humility becomes the underlying premise of servant leadership in that the leader seeks first to serve others; this commitment of service is a natural concomitant to a leader's desire to serve others. The commitment to leadership as service is consistent with Greenleaf's (1977) belief the authentic leader is servant first. Great leadership comes not from those who seek leadership in pursuit of power, but from those with a compelling vision and a desire is to serve others (Spears, 1997).

Fry (2003, 2005) proposes a theory of spiritual leadership based on intrinsic motivation theory that incorporates elements of vision, hope/faith, altruistic love, and a sense of spiritual survival based on calling and membership. Fry (2003) defines intrinsic motivation as flowing from an "interest and enjoyment of an activity for its own sake" (p. 699), arguing intrinsic motivation is associated with active engagement in a task people find enjoyable and which promotes growth and satisfaction of higher needs. Intrinsic motivation has been linked to better learning, performance, and well-being and to contribute to an individual's need for competence, autonomy, and relatedness. In addition to spiritual leadership, intrinsic motivation is an important component of several leadership theories, such as path-goal leadership, charismatic leadership, and transformational leadership (Fry, 2003).

Spiritual leadership is comprised of the "values, attitudes, and behaviors necessary...intrinsically [to] motivate one's self and others so...they have a sense of spiritual survival" (pp. 694–695). Spiritual survival is dependent upon two interlocking elements in the workplace: a sense of transcendence—calling or being called vocationally—and a

need for social connection or membership (Fry, 2003). To be “called” is to experience a sense of making a difference through service to others and, in doing so “deriving meaning and purpose in life” (p. 703). Membership emerges from the interplay of the cultural and social structures in which people are immersed and through which they seek to be understood and appreciated. Pfeffer (2003) identifies four benefits people seek through the workplace relevant to spiritual survival. These elements are: interesting and meaningful work that endows one with a sense of competence and mastery; work that provides a sense of purpose; an environment characterized by a sense of connection and positive relations with co-workers; and the opportunity to live an integrated existence where work and non-work roles are in harmony with a person’s sense of him or herself. The first two of these benefits (meaningful work that gives one a sense of competency, mastery, and purpose) supply a sense of calling; the last two (a sense of connection and to co-workers and the opportunity to live an integrated existence) comprise membership. Calling and membership are integrated, universal, and common to human experience (Fry, 2003).

According to Fry (2003) the essential components of spiritual leadership are vision, altruistic love, hope/faith, and spiritual survival. *Vision* produces a picture of the future of the organization that contains implicit or explicit reasons as to why people should work to create that future. Vision serves three critical functions: it *clarifies* the general direction of the organization; it *coordinates* the activities of a large number of different people; and it *mobilizes* members of the organization by describing where the organization is headed, giving meaning to the work of the organization, and encouraging hope and faith (Fry, 2003).

Altruistic love is an essential component of spiritual leadership. It is defined as a sense of wholeness, harmony, and well-being produced through values such as care, concern, and appreciation for both self and others. It encompasses the practices of patience, kindness, lack of envy, forgiveness, humility, trust, loyalty, and truthfulness. Altruistic love serves to counter the negative emotions associated with life within organizations: fear, anger, a sense of failure, and pride (Fry, 2003). This concept is consistent with the idea of *agapao* love described previously.

Hope/Faith is the basis on which organization members are convinced the organization’s vision will be achieved. “People with hope/faith have a vision of where they are going and how to get there” (p. 93). Because they have hope/faith, organization members are willing to “do what it takes” in achieving the organization’s future (p. 714).

Spiritual survival refers to a sense of calling or of being called to an occupation or profession and the need for social connection or

membership. Calling is associated with how one makes a difference and derives meaning and purpose in life. Membership refers to participation in the cultural and social structures of an organization through which one seeks to be understood and appreciated as a person. Feelings of understanding and appreciation are a result of the quality of the interrelationships and social interactions in which people in the organization are involved. Calling and membership address the dimensions of what people seek at work: interesting and meaningful work that provides a sense of purpose; a sense of connection and positive social relationships; and the ability to live an integrated life consistent with who one is (Fry, 2003). People's need for sense of calling and membership are universal.

This spiritual leadership model incorporates intrinsic motivation, vision, altruistic love, hope/faith, and a sense of spiritual survival. The exercise of spiritual leadership contributes to positive organizational outcomes such as a positive perception of the meaning and purpose of work, a sense of calling and membership, commitment to the organization, increased productivity, and a commitment to continuous personal improvement.

Discussion

In this section we undertake a discussion of issues surrounding spiritual leadership including the ethics of spiritual leadership, the relationship of spirituality and religion, a comparison of spiritual and transformative leadership, limitations of the theories, and the relevance of spiritual leadership to the practice of leadership.

The ethics of spiritual leadership. Servant Leadership and Spiritual Leadership are examples of ethical leadership theories (Yukl, 2013). Ethical leadership theories concentrate on the leader's use of power to influence the behavior of others, and emphasize the personal characteristics of leaders, especially integrity, altruism, humility, empathy and healing, personal growth, fairness, and empowerment of others in the organization. Ethical leaders nurture followers, empower them, promote social justice, and discourage unethical practices in both followers and the organization as a whole (Yukl, 2013). Servant leadership theory "explains why the primary concerns of leaders should be to nurture, develop and protect followers," (p. 357) while spiritual leadership theory describes how leaders can "enhance the spiritual meaning in the work experienced by followers" (p. 357). Both models of spiritual leadership, with their emphasis on the welfare and development of followers and prohibition of the coercive use of power, constitute ethical approaches to leadership.

Spirituality and religion. One of the issues effecting spiritual leadership theory is the relationship of spirituality to religion and religious belief.

Tisdell (2001) defines religion as an organized community of faith centered on a written set of dogmas. Spirituality, on the other hand, is broader than any organized religion's particular set of doctrines (Fry, 2003). Spirituality is "the source for one's search for spiritual survival—for meaning in life and a sense of interconnectedness with other beings" (p. 705). Spirituality describes an individual's search to discover his or her potential, his or her ultimate purpose, and to find a relationship with a transcendent power that may—or may not be—called "God." Fry (2003) invokes the Dalai Lama:

Religion I take to be concerned with faith in the claims of one faith tradition or another, an aspect of which is the acceptance of some form of heaven or nirvana. Connected with this are religious teachings or dogma, ritual prayer, and so on. Spirituality I take to be concerned with those qualities of the human spirit—such as love and compassion, patience[,] tolerance, forgiveness, contentment, a sense of responsibility, a sense of harmony—which bring about happiness to both self and others. (p. 705)

Spirituality is not synonymous with or necessarily exclusive of any of the world's organized religions.

Spiritual and transformative leadership. Spiritual leadership differs from transformative leadership in important ways. As conceptualized by Burns (1978) and Bass (1998), transformative leadership's seeks to elevate the awareness of employees to look beyond their own self-interest to the mission and good of the organization. It is essentially a process for building employee commitment to organizational goals and empowering them to achieve those objectives (Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2003). This model does not necessarily seek the employees' growth and development beyond what is needed to meet the organization's goals. In contrast, spiritual leadership shifts leader focus from the goals of the organization to the long-term development of employees. The primary difference between transformational leadership and spiritual leadership is the focus of the leader. While both theories demonstrate concern for followers, transformational leaders have greater concern for achieving organizational goals while spiritual leaders focus on service to employees. The degree to which the leader may shift his or her focus from the organization to the follower is the distinguishing factor in determining whether the leader is a transformational or spiritual leader (Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2003).

Limitations of the theories. There are certain limitations to spiritual leadership theories and many questions remain. For example, how do the values and skills influence the behavior of the leader? How specifically do spiritual leaders influence followers? What is the relative

significance of calling and membership and how are they interrelated? How does one become a spiritual leader and what life experiences are most relevant? Can spirituality and religious belief be separated effectively, especially in organizations and communities with strong cultural values and religious traditions?

Spiritual leadership theories have emerged in response to fundamental changes in the ways organizations function and the need to find a more holistic, humane approach to leadership. This new leadership paradigm integrates the totality of human existence, the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual into the workplace. The current environment of public education, where teaching and leading are being reduced to “numbers”—e. g., standardized test scores, dollars devoted to merit-pay programs, scores generated by a punitive “value-added” teacher-evaluation system, the total of narrowly educational outcomes met (Taubman, 2009)—seems ripe for such a change in leadership. With its emphasis on the long-term development of followers, an ethic of care and concern, and its element of trust-building and collaboration, spiritual leadership offers one possible alternative to top-down, command-and-control, and punitive styles of leadership. Fry (2003) offers the following description of spiritual leadership:

A spiritual leader is someone who walks in front of one when one needs someone to follow, behind one when one needs encouragement, and beside one when one needs a friend. Spiritual leaders lead people through intellectual discourse and dialog and believe that people, when they are involved and properly informed, can make intelligent decisions and that, with appropriate information, can assume responsibility for decisions that affect their lives. (Powers quoted in Fry, 2003, p. 720)

We can think of no more powerful a description of genuine educational leadership.

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