

# Spiritual leadership at the workplace: Perspectives and theories (Review)

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**Abstract.** Leadership has always been an area of interest since time immemorial. Nevertheless, scientific theories regarding leadership started to appear only from the beginning of the 20th century. Modern theories of leadership such as strategic leadership theory emerged as early as the 1980s when outdated theories of behavioral contingency were questioned, resulting in the beginning of a shift in focus leading to the emergence of modern theories hypothesizing the importance of vision, motivation and value-based control of clan and culture. Value-driven clan control emphasizes the importance of the role played by employees in a rapidly changing work environment. Therefore, the 21st century marked the rise of the need to establish a culture driven by values, inspiring the workforce to struggle and strongly seek a shared vision. This can be accomplished by an effective and motivating leadership.

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## 1. Introduction

There are mainly three areas of focus regarding spirituality in the workplace: i) Identifying spiritual values and behaviours; ii) examining conceptual frameworks and models pertaining to spirituality; and iii) developing instruments for measuring

spirituality. Spiritual leadership and workplace spirituality are in their infancy, and consequently, theoretical knowledge related to this subject in Western religious theology and practiced leadership ethics and values is limited (1,2).

The aim of the present review is to discuss the theories on spiritual leadership at the workplace.

## 2. Leadership and motivation

Leadership has always been an area of interest since time immemorial. Nevertheless, scientific theories on leadership emerged at the beginning of the 20th century. There is growing interest in the issues related to spirituality in the workplace and according to the leadership quarterly special issue by Fry (1), spirituality in the workplace has become the subject of numerous studies in recent years. A well-documented theory of leadership introduced by Judge *et al* (2) explained the importance of the situation in determining the effectiveness of leadership. Consequently, a good leader has to evaluate the situation and act accordingly (3). Eventually, the radar gradually shifted towards investigating the circumstances and behavioral patterns of the leaders in achieving an optimum team and organizational upshots.

According to an earlier study carried out by the Michigan and Ohio State Universities, capable leaders often gave equal importance to the assignments as well as the social or emotional challenges their team encountered (4). In the late 1960s, attention was drawn to the 'contingency theory', which postulated that in an effective leadership, requirements of a situation must be well met by the leader's behavior (4). In this theory, again, it was the leader's behavior that was given due importance as the quintessential factor responsible for positive outcomes. An extrapolation of the contingency theory is the path-goal theory (4), which considers motivation to be a crucial determinant of excellent leadership. The components of this theory, which are also interlinked, involve effort, performance and reward in a forward order. Thus, an effective leadership has to cohesively link effort to reward and performance to reward. It should also stretch performance targets through supportive and directive measures and understand the need for rewarding a good performance in order to keep up the motivation for a given task (4).

Kerr and Jermier (5) suggested substitutes for leadership theories by shifting the focus to circumstances that tend to

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neutralize the temperaments of the leadership. At present, the emphasis is mostly on modifying the leadership qualities to suit the demands of a given situation to foster a better outcome.

Modern theories of leadership such as strategic leadership theory emerged as early as the 1980s when outdated theories of behavioral contingency were questioned. Beginning in the 1980s, there began to be a shift in focus. Modern theories hypothesize the importance of vision, motivation and value-based control of clan and culture. Value-driven clan control emphasizes the importance of the role of employees in a rapidly changing environment (6). It is a given that modern situations are pregnant with rapidly changing and ever demanding situations. Consequently, modern thinkers examined orthodox theories of leadership, which were formal, rigid and bureaucratic in outlook. Traditional approaches were challenged when US-dominated automobile and steel industries were eliminated by the Japanese (6). Team leadership and total quality management made their appearance as alternatives to bureaucracy (6,7).

The key elements of modern leadership involve co-operation, consideration, agreement, fairness, and social equality. The adaptability culture requires the leader to be autonomous, take initiatives for improvement, creative, risk-taker, learn from the fluidic situation and emerge with new objectives and strategies to suit the overall growth of the organization. The ever-changing industry was crucial in molding the present theories of leadership. The distinction between management and leadership as mediators of control and motivation respectively was clarified (8,9). The roles of management and leadership became clearer with the newly suggested guidelines (10). Management and leadership should highlight a direction for the organization by defining the aims and objectives. The more specific role of the management is to plan, organize, staff, direct and control the organization, thereby ensuring its stability and predictable performance. Leadership, on the other hand, pertains to motivating employees at all times, including during a period of crisis. At the outset, path-goal, charismatic (10) and transformational (11) theories of leadership focus on motivating the followers. The definition of the generic process of leadership as developed by Kouzes and Pozner (12) is as follows: 'Leadership is the art of mobilizing others to want to struggle for shared aspirations'. Leadership concerns having a vision for a desirable and compelling future in the organization. When vision is stated clearly and complemented with a sense of mission by defining the employees' roles and motivating them to execute, the foundation for the organization becomes strong and entrenched. The fundamental ethics on which the organization is based, should act as guidelines for proper and improper behaviour (5). Therefore, in the 21st century, it has become necessary to establish a culture driven by values that inspires the workforce to struggle and strongly desire for a shared vision that can be accomplished by an effective and motivating leadership.

### 3. Motivation-based leadership theories

Theories on research and development of leadership have been intensively studied (13,3). Extensive research is conducted on leadership theories that focus on the followers' motivation, including path-goal, (4) charismatic (8,10,14) and transactional

and transformational (15) theories. The term motivation essentially means driving force, either external or internal to an individual that ignites enthusiasm and the ability to persist and pursue a given task. It mainly deals with factors that create enthusiasm and those that direct this energy towards the desired goals and expectations and sustain the level of energy and performance. Setting up realistic goals, rewards and feedback in some form play definite roles in motivation (16,17). Contemporary thinkers have postulated that individuals start and persist with the particular behavior assuming that such a behavior is likely to lead to desired goals.

The responsibility of the leaders in an organization is to motivate the workforce in delivering their best by creating a conducive environment and rewarding the employees appropriately. Motivation refers to those rewards on performance-driven desires that aim to produce the best result in employees by encouraging them to show their indigenous skills to an optimum level (18). There are two basic types of motivation: extrinsic and intrinsic. A variety of external factors that could motivate an individual is pay hike, recognition of performance by promotion, bonuses, insurance benefits and timely vacation.

In order to receive external rewards, employees have to satisfy the requirements of a given order. Extrinsic motivation compels individuals to perform tasks to satisfy an external source in order that they can meet those lower order needs necessary to survive. In the earlier days, large organizations such as the Roman Army, Catholic Church, and Kingdom of England were based on fear-driven principles. They were successful in controlling large populations by bureaucratic means. However, individuals had no other choice than to serve the masters with an organizational commitment and virtually no 'feel-good' factor with regard to their work. Eventually, this led to low self-esteem, low enthusiasm and powerlessness (19). There was no scope for open communication to address the issues that were bothering the employees, which ultimately led to severe lack of trust in the organization.

Interest and enjoyment of activity for its own sake along with involvement in activities that are interesting and can promote growth and satisfy higher order needs is defined as intrinsic motivation. Better learning, performance and well-being are associated with intrinsic motivation (20,21), which results from an individual's need for autonomy, relatedness and competence. Intrinsic motivation is increased by autonomy to such an extent that one experiences a locus of causality and the individual places additional effort in following their interest as the task accomplishment is under the individual's control. When individuals in the task environment are experienced as warm and caring, a sense of secure relatedness develops which in turn, favors intrinsic motivation. A feeling of craftsmanship or artistry that he or she is handling task situations better usually results in more confidence in handling similar tasks in the future (22-24).

Intrinsic motivation at work is evident as autonomy, competence, and relatedness and requires a certain degree of self-management or autonomy at the working environment. Working in empowered teams that direct the team towards a meaningful purpose creates a feeling of competence and relatedness in intrinsically-motivated workers. A sense of ownership of the work is developed in individuals of such empowered teams and they contribute their best thinking and

creativity and are completely engaged in their tasks. Such individuals are excited to have a sense of progress and see results of their efforts and take pride in their work (25,26).

Tasks that are internal and under the control of the individual involve intrinsic rewards and thus competency, self-determination, and self-fulfillment are achieved. Examples of intrinsic awards include, a feeling of accomplishment on the completion of a complex task or fulfilling a personal mission or purpose, which helps in solving a problem at work that in turn, can benefit others or constitute a part of the winning team (12). Such internal awards lead to a feeling of satisfaction of their performance and it is achieved through internal experience. Through goal identification, intrinsic motivation at work can be simulated. This persuades the individuals to initialize their visions and values which positively influence the goals and sub-goals of the organization (18). Such goals are valued by individuals as these goals are acquired through a long process of socialization in the organization or as the individuals were involved in establishing the organization's vision, values, and goals. Therefore, they have a high acceptance of and are highly committed to these goals. Thus, achievements of such goals are more rewarding towards a higher order of satisfying self-esteem and aid to professional growth.

#### 4. Spirituality literature review

Increased attention has been paid to issues related to spirituality in the workplace. This has become a growing area of research and inquiry according to the leadership quarterly special issue by Fry (1). As mentioned earlier, the areas of focus in this regard are: i) Identifying spiritual values and behaviors, ii) examining conceptual frameworks and models pertaining to spirituality, and iii) developing instruments for measuring spirituality. Two essential elements of spirituality include: i) Transcendence of self which usually manifests in a sense of calling or destiny, and ii) belief that one's activities have meaning and value beyond economic benefits or self-gratification. Development of certain values, including vision (for example, developing a definition of destination, reflection of high ideals, and encouraging the hope/faith emotions), altruistic love (i.e., forgiveness, kindness, integrity, empathy, honesty, patience, trust and humility), and hope/faith promotes a sense of calling and higher meaning. Similarly, Kriger and Hanson (27) suggested a similar set of spiritual values for employees to thrive and grow in modern organizations, including, honesty/truthfulness, trust, humility, forgiveness, compassion, thankfulness, service, and stillness/peace. Potential sources of these spiritual values were not suggested by any of these authors. Spiritual behaviors including demonstrating respect, treating others fairly, expressing care and concern, listening responsively, appreciating the contributions of others, and engaging in spiritual practice and values such as integrity, ethical influence, honest communication, and humility contributes to the expression of spirituality. This was reported by Reave (28) following an extensive literature review. Source of spirituality was not discussed in any of these reviews, but it was quoted that practicing spirituality does not require spiritual faith. This could be due to the fear of belief that spirituality should not be constrained by the doctrine of any one particular faith or religion (29) and that clearly defining spirituality may lead to dogmatic rigidity (30).

#### 5. Models of spirituality

Spirituality in leadership has numerous conceptions but lacks clarity in construct definitions (30). To fill the need, an intrinsic motivation model with spirituality in leadership was proposed by Fry (31). In this model, known as 'The organizational outcomes of commitment and productivity', intrinsic motivation of self and followers occurs through values, attitudes, and behaviours. The leader's spirituality was not discussed as it could create controversy with regard to proposed support for a particular faith or religion or a single potential source of spirituality (29).

Based on the multiple linkage model, Kriger and Seng (32) suggested that the commitment of subordinates is largely influenced by the leader's spirituality. A leader's spirituality affects their vision and behavior and the subordinates' commitment is greatly influenced by the leader's vision and goals. The profitability, realization of values and vision and collective organizational responsibility to society and stakeholders accords a measure of a leaders' effectiveness. This model suggested religious faith as a source of spiritual values and behaviors. Depending on the religious traditions of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, the variable may be Yahweh, God, Allah, Shiva, or Buddha. For religions in which the concept of God is beyond all names, Kriger and Seng (32) used to refer to that which is ontologically beyond names and, thus, uncreated. A possible explanation is that firstly, it could be a socially constructed reality, which is created by those with religious beliefs. Secondly, it may be an emerging reality that is co-created between human beings and God, or Being which is real unto itself.

Having faith and hope in a personal and loving God, desiring to be close to God, and having a higher calling to serve God are all elements included under spiritual beliefs and praying, meditating, and reading scripture. In 1999, Fetzer (33) suggested a model for measuring spirituality known as the multidimensional measure of religiousness/spirituality (MMRS). MMRS has become the standard measure of religiousness and spirituality because of its comprehensive nature, which consists of 128 questions. A short version of the instrument is known as the brief multidimensional measure of religiousness/spirituality (BMMRS) consisting of 38 items with descriptive statistics and reliability coefficients. In a study on 1,445 participants in which the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficients were calculated, the results ranged from 0.64 to 0.91 (34). Spiritual beliefs, experiences, and coping domains as well as spiritual practices domain were assessed in a subset of the BMMRS with 23 statements.

#### 6. Leadership theories and workplace spirituality

There now seems to be a confluence of the new learning organizational paradigms and the accelerating trends for workplace spirituality. The qualities and processes for facilitating this confluence is a key issue that needs to be addressed by different types of leaderships (strategic leadership, leadership in empowered teams and personal leadership). Where an organization steps back from accommodating changes to incorporate workplace spirituality, success of transition to the learning organizational paradigm appears to be a remote

possibility. Studies on spiritual leadership as well as workplace spirituality are in their early stages. Therefore, theoretical and research data are lacking in these areas, with the exception of the organizational theories related to Western religious theology and practice and leadership ethics and values (35,36).

Leadership in spirituality plays a pivotal role in terms of ethics and values, that is to say, in inculcating and reinforcing personal, team, and organizational values (36). Leadership and ethics share a synergistic relationship in spirituality because leadership ensures ethics and ethics is central to leadership. The nature of the leadership and the need to engage followers to accomplish mutual goals creates this type of synergism between the two parties. However, strong research contribution to and a sound theoretical background of leadership ethics and values is lacking. Although this review does not encompass the development of ethical theory in terms of the individual or definitions of values and morals, it covers the vision aspect and core values of humility and altruistic love. A prime role has been assigned to the positive impact of business on employees and community by Greenleaf (37,38) who focused on servant leadership. Service and meaning find intersection in the servant leader. The servant leader, by serving basic spiritual values to which he/she is attuned to, serves the other links that he/she is mapped to on a daily basis such as colleagues, organization and society. Thus, the term 'service' when associated with the servant leader does not refer to a special type of leadership but rather, to a special kind of service. Mediating the discovery of inner spirit in others, gaining and maintaining the trust of others, service above self interest and effective listening, form the framework for servant leadership. Therefore, it is not a seeker of leadership roles but the one with a compelling vision and a desire to serve others first that makes the best servant leader (39).

Another concept in spiritual leadership is Covey's (40,41) principle-centered leadership. Principle-centered leaders willingly serve (calling) others while keeping the harmony with natural laws and principles. These leaders are guided by the seven habits that enable them to renew harmony and maintain balance in the background of constant changes and external pressures. These habits drive them to keep learning, value first, believe in others, radiate positive energy, face life as an adventure, be synergistic, lead balanced lives, and renew through exercise. There are four master principles forming the guiding framework of Covey's (41) principle-centred leadership: i) personal trustworthiness, ii) interpersonal trust, iii) managerial empowerment, and iv) organizational alignment. In terms of bringing these principles into action, principled-centered leaders begin with inner practice and move towards outer practice at the personal, interpersonal, managerial, and organizational levels.

Kouzes and Pozner (12) define leadership as 'the art of mobilizing others to want to struggle for shared aspirations'. Five fundamental practices to that effect include process challenging, inspiring a shared vision, motivating action, role modeling and setting an example by fitting into the shared values. To extol a leader and give him/her credibility in motivation of manpower to perform and make a difference, followers look at four essential characteristics as their measuring tools: Honesty, foresightedness, ability to inspire the pursuit of shared vision and competency (42). Commitment towards the organization and productivity is evident as a significant

change in followers once they perceive their leaders to have high credibility. Being understood and appreciated comprise the basic human need to own membership and this need leans on the support of a central practice (encouraging the heart). Encouraging the heart is not the same as being gregarious and backslapping, gold stars and payoffs. It is an absolute essentiality to sustain people's commitment to organizations and its outcomes, dedication to accomplish extraordinary feats and ways to enhance the ability in conjunction with recognizing and celebrating the achievements of the others (43).

Similarly, value-based leadership anchors on shared, strongly internalized values preached and practiced by the leader (44,45). Value-based leaders make follower effort and organizational goals more meaningful by connecting them to the deeper values of the followers. They energize in the followers extraordinary motivation, commitment and performance by making them visualize a better future and by connecting to their deeper values, thus infusing an inner faith in their self-efficacy and self-worth. This encourages the followers to contribute whole heartedly to the leaders' mission and the collective vision (45). Empirical evidence from over 50 studies has shown that a value-based leader's behavior has powerful effects on follower's motivation and work unit performance (31,44,45).

Barrett (46) suggested that the employees' personal, organizational and employee-defined values for high performance need to be aligned to each other. He suggests that each level of Maslow's (47,48) hierarchy of needs can be attributed to a level of consciousness. He suggested expansion of the highest level of self-actualization to include four distinct stages in the development of spiritual awareness: i) Transformation, ii) cohesion, iii) inclusion, and iv) unity. Barrett's model banks on the assumption that leaders who function with a full spectrum of consciousness and align with the deeper values of the employees to a high degree are likely to become prominent in the market in relation to customer/client satisfaction and shareholder value. It makes a research-based claim that highly aligned, full spectrum organizations yield high profits given that they emphasize employee fulfillment and customer satisfaction.

Of all the proposed models, Fairholm (49-51) has the most completely developed model of leadership thus far. Derived from Greenleaf's (37) ideas relating to servant leadership, it is a holistic approach that considers the goals of the organization as well as the leaders' and followers' full capacities, potential, needs and interests. Spiritual leaders mediate the care of one's body, mind, heart, and spirit by the followers. They may foster co-operation, trust mutual care and commitment by developing inspiring vision and mission statements. They may gain followers' acceptance by displaying their knowledge regarding the functioning of the group and by proving their competency in the areas of credibility, teaching, trust, and inspiration (42). Leadership tasks, spiritual leadership process technologies and continuous improvement are the three broad categories in which characteristics of the eight elements defined by the model fit in. Continuous progress and improvement in service is the prime need. The tasks and processes of spiritual leadership ultimately focus on the goal of building and operating a continually improving, learning organization. They aim at liberating, bringing out the best in people creating a mental state of inner peace in leaders, their followers and other stakeholders.



To summarize, religious, ethics as well as value-based leadership approaches seem to give a loud and clear message that leaders must be versed with their core values and impart them to the followers through vision and personal actions. They must attempt to concur with the followers' needs for spiritual survival and visionary enough to encourage membership through the basic values of humility, charity, and veracity while serving the followers and other relevant stakeholders.

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