

The Spiritual Leadership Dimension In Relation to Other Value-Based Leadership in Organization

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to explore the concept of spiritual leadership in the context of organization and to show the several means by which spiritual leadership can be related to existing value-based leadership theories, especially relationship oriented and servant leaderships, though the direction of such an inquiry still requires much more observation, development and discussion. This article would also discuss several beneficial perceptions and motivations which have stimulated the interest to understand deeper the spiritual leadership in academic and business settings. This article will be concluded with an argument that gaining deeper insight on the theoretical base of spiritual leadership in relation to other leadership theories is necessary so that this concept can be a valuable paradigm for the organization. Using rational-empirical approach, where inquiry is conducted based on data from various literature review (grand theory) and previous research findings, this study is expected to provide further contribution by showing and focusing on the relation between spiritual leadership and other value-based leadership theories and provide contribution for critical and theoretical understanding, which is necessary for the development of spiritual leadership which was initially a concept into a paradigm which has the potential to be applied in the organization. The result of this study shows that despite the relation between spiritual leadership and other value-based leadership theories, however gaining deeper theoretical insight into spiritual leadership is still an important objective, especially to be related to other leadership theories.

Keywords: spiritual leadership, relationship oriented leadership, servant leadership

Spirituality in Organizational Context

Much literature has been accumulated in academic, business and public domain which explores the concept of spiritual leadership in the context of secular organization. This literature has covered various aspects and shown the reason why spiritual leadership has been interpreted in various level of complexities. Driscoll & Wiebe (2007) state that publication in popular business media on spiritual leadership has been criticized because it has many uncontrolled assumptions and is based on shallow understanding on the existing literature. There are few empirical studies on spiritual leadership and this may explain the emergence of many perceptions which should be examined more rigorously.

A tendency to give greater attention to spirituality has emerged in American society (Pratt, 2000). Multidisciplinary literature which has studied the re-emergence of spiritual paradigm states that such an interest has regained popularity due to the dissatisfaction with rampant materialism (Hoppe, 2005) or that the emergence of spiritual paradigm is a form of a “post-materialistic” concern (Majima & Savage, 2007). The emergence of interest on spirituality is related to the need to find solution for the ills of modern society, and it is also influenced by holistic philosophies and shifts in scientific paradigm which has occurred in many professions, organization and scientific disciplines (Crossman, 2003).

Public figures and community leaders have also expressed and acknowledge the impact of spirituality on their professional success, especially in relation to ethics (Cavanagh & Bandsuch, 2002; Epstein, 2002).

Since the 1980s, “new” leadership theories have given much emphasis on emotional, moral and subjective values (Modaff *et al.*, 2008). Faith, patience, intuition and humility, which are so far largely ignored in leadership literature (Thompson, 2005) begin to receive more attention from the managers and academicians studying the topic of leadership (Millman & Ferguson, 2008; Pratt, 2000; Russell, 2001). Many studies have been published on spiritual attributes and several writers have also discussed leadership from certain religion or philosophy, for instance Durlabhi (2004), who has studied the implementation of Taoism in organizational behavior and leadership.

Academicians from various disciplines have also been challenged to create a definition of spirituality which would apply in daily life. However, difference of understanding would explicitly reduce the belief in the rigor of those many views (Speck, 2005). Spirituality is considered by several writers to be individual or personal experience (Houston & Sokolow, 2006; Speck, 2005) and it is assumed to be a “matter of the heart” which can not be disputed by others, and therefore creates a conceptual separation between spirituality and religion. This means that spirituality in general is considered to be a personal experience which is interpreted in individual terms and unsystematically, while religion is considered to be an institutionalized public process which is based on holy texts and expressed through rituals (Crossman, 2003).

Respect for individual rights to interpret spirituality personally can also be found in the realm of law and politics, for instance in government's stance which gives emphasis on its religious “neutrality” (Lowery, 2005). Such neutrality would support a relativistic approach in spirituality, which would be very useful for understanding the position of spiritual leadership in secular organizations. Spiritual relativism has a long history and has even become part of the Durkheim's (1915/1918) idea that religion cannot be included in a hierarchy because all religions are true according to their own perception in responding to the same problems and questions stemming from human existence. However, spiritual relativism has been admitted as an approach with sufficient respect on religion and therefore can be applied in many global work setting which has the “matrix” and “synergy” of various spiritual perspective concerning how work must be carried out (Geroy, 2005).

Spiritual matters are now often discussed in the literature of leadership and management (Fairholm, 2003). The current tendency shows that there are tangible benefit from spiritual approach, for instance improvement of morale, reduction of stress and turnover, improvement performance net income, and positive impact on stock price (Crossman, 2008).

Scientific contribution for the spiritual leadership is largely related to the “affirming life force” or intrinsic motivation. According to Fry & Cohen (2009), the objectives of spiritual leadership are: to tap into the fundamental needs of the leaders and followers for spiritual welfare through calling and membership, in order to achieve a harmony of vision and value among individuals, among empowered teams, and between organizational level which would in turn improve the well-being and organizational commitment of the employees, and improve financial performance and social responsibility of the organization. Further, Fry & Cohen state that the spiritual leadership theory is developed based on intrinsic motivation model and other characteristics such as hope, faith and altruism (Fry & Cohen, 2009).

The relation between hope, faith and altruism based on calling and membership is depicted by Fry & Cohen (2009) as follows:

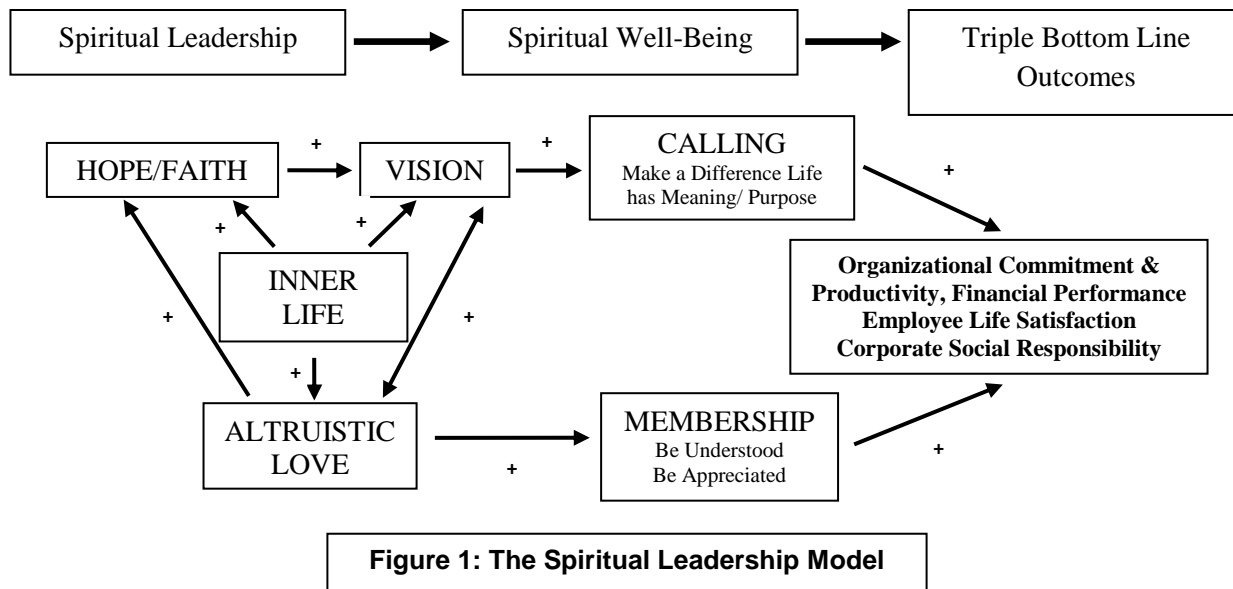


Figure 1: The Spiritual Leadership Model

Based on this discussion, it would not be surprising to see that many organizations begin to give attention and to integrated spiritual perspective into their mission statement and work program despite the fact that its supporting evidence is still mixed. Some of the large companies which have applied spirituality in their organization are Dilmah Tea (Fernando *et al.*, 2009), Amway (Pratt, 2000), Tom's, Maine (Tischler, 2005), Ford (Burack, 1999), Memorial Healthcare System (Wolf, 2004), and Southwest Airlines (Rigoglioso, 1999). These organizations have responded to the spiritual need and responsibility by various means, such as by improving the awareness on religious diversity, inviting spiritual professional to counsel the employees, applying *yoga*, *feng shui* and *taichi* as part of the stress management program, promoting practices which are consistent in spiritual and ecological terms with the concern over the earth and allowing for volunteer activities or leave for charity work (Cash & Gray, 2000). Diversity in the way organizations interpret spiritual leadership and the wide expanse of the studies and complexity of interpretation is one of the reasons behind Driscoll & Wiebe's (2007) comment that history may have provided the opportunity for spiritual leaders to be a means to "soothe the soul of the workers" or to contribute to a transformation in management.

Despite the signs of growing interest on spiritual leadership in secular organizations, the relation between business and spirituality can still be characterized as that of an opposition. According to Sumner (in Epstein, 2002), a professor from Yale University, business and spirituality in the 20th century can never be perfectly aligned to each other due to difference of purpose, one being spiritual and the other being business. Such a view was widely held in the 20th century, where spirituality tends to be separated from the daily activities of professionals. Durkheim sees that the holy and the profane cannot "live together as one" since the two are basically antagonistic one to another. Durkheim's view can be found in a perspective which places spiritual leadership in a "gray area" where spiritual leadership can be seen as "setting up camp in the same area as irrational thought and astrology, which is considered to be manipulative and bordering on insanity" (Metcalf, 2008).

However in comparison with the rational and scientific organizational culture, the culture perspective on human behavior actually has the potential for creating a balanced perspective on various organizational issues. At present, many managers and academicians tend to "speculate on things which are difficult to be studied by science". Carver & Sekeres (2008), for instance, have studied the American-Christian business context and they have explored the many potential tension in the mission statements and tried to balance Christian conduct with business conduct.

Several papers have reported the narration from personal experience and testimony, which try to map the spiritual journey in understanding the relation between spiritual matters and professional identity (Delbecq, 2004; Manz *et al.*, 2004).

Garza (2004) states that “in my view, nothing is more spiritual than being involved in a complex manner with the material world in the most non-abstract sense”. This view tries to tap into several related and holistic concepts in order to integrate the spiritual journey, personal experience and business interest.

Many individuals have undergone spiritual journey to create a relation between the persona in workplace and their spiritual persona so that they can create a holistic organizational setting (Cash & Gray, 2000; Epstein, 2002; Fairholm, 2003; Hoppe, 2005). The comprehensive spiritual and professional relation have also been explored in the literature concerning management of the change in personnel and organization (Wheatley, 2002). The Taoist concept on leadership emphasizes on the maintenance of the balance between *yin* and *yang*. An effective leader according to Taoist perspective would give his/her attention to nurturing, showing empathy, supporting those who are vulnerable emotionally, and improve a harmonious interpersonal relation (*yin*) but also gives emphasis on the achievement of tasks and goals, that is the “action” aspect from a rational leadership (*yang*) (Durlabhi, 2004).

In their effort to be more spiritually oriented, secular organizations should by all means avoid contra-productive attitude by forcing individuals to participation in a spiritual culture which does not “match” their personality. Such a situation may often incite the emergence of “dark side” of the emotional turbulence, which in this context can be called as spiritual struggle. Dominating elements and social pressure do exists in all organizations and such a tendency is also apparent in religious organizations (Western, 2008). As stated by Thompson (2005), spiritual leadership must not slip into “proselytizing” where organization binds the individual spiritually to the organization by stating that the spiritual paradigm of the organization is the only acceptable or relevant one for the individual.

Organization is also responsible for making sure that the application of a spiritual paradigm is not abused for manipulating public perception for mere profit. Literature has discussed briefly the benefit, in the form of staff well-being, where it is stated that rational outcome may be responded in a cynical manner by employees. The explanation of how employees are obligated to contribute 10 percent of their pay to charity or religious external organization and how it can improve financial performance and improve client and employee satisfaction (Wolf, 2004) have shown clearly that spiritual leadership has quite a large impact on the perception of the public and employees. However, without a strong belief on ethical responsibility, then representations such as the above can on the other hand be regarded as a potential for abuse, especially for the employees who are vulnerable spiritually.

Spiritual Leaders and Spiritual Leadership

Other than discussing the concept of spiritual leadership in terms of context of the emergence of the leadership, one of the other objectives of this article is to explore how spiritual leadership can be related to several other leadership theories. The descriptors which have been identified are complex, wide, diverse and sometimes overlap with one another. The above mentioned descriptors are: compassion and caring, courage, hope, honesty, humility, inspiration, integrity and sense of purpose, intuition, optimism, unity, openness and transparency, forgiveness, gratitude, patience, service, stillness and peace, thankfulness, tolerance, meaning making or sense making, experience, vision.

Basically these descriptors express the social expectation of spiritual individual and spiritual leader. A spiritual individual would have certain characteristics, but spiritual leader is expected to have the same characteristics in deeper level than other people (Thompson, 2005). The descriptors presented here shows that spiritual leadership has a close relation with the theories of relationship oriented leadership, servant leadership, leader-follower, and leaderful theory since the descriptors in the inventory of spiritual leadership and spirituality is also present in the literature for these other leadership theories.

Sendjaya *et al.* (2008) state that spiritual leadership, relationship oriented leadership and servant leadership are part of the “value-based leadership theories”, since these contains spiritual elements which serve as a response to disturbing situation, non-ethical leadership or abuse in an unhealthy organization.

Many of the spiritual values in the list of characteristics above are based on the primary religions of the world, but they are still appreciated when implemented in the secular practice and policy (Mitroff, 2003). These spiritual values are taken and adapted from the religious tradition into ethical approaches in a practice which is more aligned to secular discourse, as the trend in many countries during the 20th century (Crossman, 2007).

Seen from this perspective, we need to reconsider the question from Driscoll & Wiebe (2007) concerning whether spirituality in the workplace is a mere “reinventing the wheel” in the previous academic discourse, such as “human relation, corporate social responsibility, development of human resource and organizational resource”. This question can now be seen as lacking depth since it tends to look backward.

The elements of relationship oriented leadership can be related to the spiritual leadership through the descriptor of “inspiration”. Spiritual leaders are often considered to be inspirational, visionary and able to move beyond the existing limitations (Fairholm, 2003; Sikula & Sikula, 2005). Burns (1978) has also described the relationship oriented leadership as inspirational, in the sense of similar to spiritual leadership, relationship oriented leadership deals with the capability of increasing the level of motivation and morality of others so that they can achieve performance beyond expectation (Sendjaya *et al.*, 2008). Therefore, relationship oriented and spiritual leadership are concentrated on higher-order needs and try to build an inspirational involvement and both are distinguishable from transactional leadership which is based on secular or worldly exchange between leader and follower.

Modaff *et al.* (2008) also state that relationship oriented leadership should stimulate intellectual activities and this perspective is consistent with spiritual leadership, which tries to be involved in a critical sense with the holistic integration between rationality and spirit. This discussion on the relation between spiritual leadership and intellectualism is close to Durkheim's (1968) idea that spirituality in the form of religion would involve thinking capacity and would be no less logical than the scientific thinking which has contributed to the “intellectual evolution of human beings” (Durkheim, 1968). However, the concept related to the critical and intellectual involvement necessary for spiritual leadership has been criticized by some. Durlabhi (2004) admits that Taoist perspective has a role in leadership, but at the same time, it must be admitted that cognitive process is considered by Taoism as an obstacle for the individual effort in arriving at the truth. Such a description of Tao philosophy does not always have to be interpreted as an idea that Taoism is anti-intellectual, but that more knowledge, both in general sense and in the specific sense of leadership knowledge, does not always bring better understanding.

Spiritual leaders are proactive leaders who can change the way others “see” and “act”. They take over situations and influence other people's attitude and action with the objective of achieving a common goal which would in the end bring benefit for the group as a whole (Modaff *et al.*, 2008). Hoppe's (2005) observation shows that spiritual leaders have the capacity to “*build* trust and compassion”. This implies that without the intervention from spiritual leaders, trust and compassion would wither and die, even within a sea of goodwill, so to speak. This perspective can be easily interpreted as the opposite of the theories which interpret leadership as a distributed phenomenon. One example is the leader-follower theories which consider leadership in a more inclusive sense. If these differences are ignored for a moment, one would see that spiritual leadership has already been related to the literature of leader-follower theory as a model of spiritual value of service (Fairholm, 2003).

Raelin (2003) approaches spirituality from the lens of “leaderful”, that is a paradigm which is emerging in organizational leadership which does not focus on one person on the forefront position as a leader but instead is based on community perspective where everyone experiences leadership in shared and collective manner. Fry & Cohen (2009) also state that spiritual leadership is an effort to involve leaders and also followers to achieve “spiritual well-being”. Similarly, Western (2008) perspective on “soul of leadership” is focused on the capacity of all leaders to have “spirit”, instead of stating that there are only a few individuals who are more suitable to be spiritual leaders than others. This literature does not put emphasis on how spiritual leaders motivate others but the emphasis is instead on how to formulate a model of trust, tolerance, courage, and forgiveness, in the sense that strengthen the development of a spiritual culture (Burack, 1999; Millman & Ferguson, 2008; Wagner, Marsh & Conley, 1999). In this sense, spiritual leaders are expected to be role model for communicating vision and ideological goals (Modaff *et al.*, 2008).

Spiritual leaders are considered to be more motivated by the need to “make a difference rather than simply make a living” and will be more focused on shared goal or social objectives (Hoppe, 2005; Speck, 2005). Durkheim also consider spirituality as “something which is basically social” (Durkheim, 1968). The concept of spiritual leadership which endeavors to achieve social goals or common good is also related to the literature of service learning in the field of higher education (Fairholm, 2003). Robert Greenleaf considers that the characteristics of servant and leader can be merged in the same individual and be applied in daily context (McCuddy & Cavin, 2008).

There are several points of similarity between servant leadership and spiritual leadership. According to Fry (2003), a servant leader should be “attuned to the spiritual values”. Spiritual and servant leadership are both characterized by virtuous approach which intrinsically inculcate love, hope, faith integrity, meaning, goal and interconnectedness in the workplace. Anderson (2008) in a literature review has conceptualized servant leadership and in doing so, has identified several descriptors such as trust, humility, vision and integrity in relation to servant leadership. Such descriptors are also found in the literature reviewed in this article in relation to spiritual leadership. The two kinds of leadership have both the element of serving others in the organization and in wider society as a manifestation of obedience and gratefulness to the higher power (Sendjaya *et al.*, 2008).

Concern over the environment is another context where common good has been explored in the management literature and it can also create a synergy with spiritual leadership. The term environmental leadership itself first emerged in the literature of several disciplines but it has been developed conceptually into a level which can serve as a general call for individuals in the organization to apply leadership approaches in dealing with the environmental problems in the world today. However, without having to be overly concerned of the theoretical condition of environmental leadership which has not developed maturely, researchers seem to be making contribution to a growing literature in several fields such as quality improvement, where environmental leadership is being related to spiritual perspective (Rice, 2003).

Cavanagh & Bandsuch (2002) also make note of the ethic and inspirational workplace decision-making, which can be beneficial not only for the organization but also for the wider society and for common good, so that it can relate the spirit, organization and environmental leadership. Therefore, environmental leadership may share the same nexus with spiritual leadership in the literature which deals with socio-cultural aspects of environmental leadership. There are also several attributes which can be found in environmental and spiritual leaders. As an example, Berry & Gordon (1993) mention the relation between humility, patience, tolerance, truthfulness, compassion and philanthropy with environmental leadership.

Relating spirituality and spiritual leadership with belief in the natural environment is an idea which is consistent with many world religions, philosophies and sacred texts. As stated by Prince (2005), the conceptualization of leadership and spirituality is related closely to culture. Organizations and institutions are often in a conflict with native spiritual belief when the ecological balance is disturbed, since economy and science is based on institutional procedures which tend to give precedence to governing process rather than protection of environment and cultural beliefs (Bauer, 2007). How the latest development where world governments cooperate with one another to deal with environmental problems would influence the synergy between the spirit, environment, government and other organizations in dealing with this common problem is not yet certain, but it seems that the lately emerging conceptualization of spiritual leadership may play a role in shaping some of the relations required to create a holistic and creative solution for new organizational problems and even for world problems.

Conclusion

This article has described some of the contextual problems which has contributed to increasing interest not only to the implications of spiritual leadership for organizations but also to its conceptual development. The development of spiritual leadership as a theoretical construct and as a perspective which is relevant and applicable for the approach and practice of the workplace has shown that spiritual leadership has and the potential to become an innovative, courageous and highly beneficial paradigm of management in the 21st century. This journey would start from reflection on the self, organization and community and would be developed further to include our responsibility for the whole planet.

The concept of spiritual leadership would require ongoing critical and theoretical involvement which would situate the concept among the existing leadership theories, especially value-based leadership theories. This process is necessary for uncovering the similarity and difference with the other forms of leadership so as to prevent confusion in thinking. The objective of this article is to initiate and point out the synergy between spiritual leadership and other kinds of leadership by a panoramic perspective and to urge other researchers to conduct deeper analysis on the relation between spiritual leadership with one certain leadership theory instead with several leadership theories. In developing this discussion further, spiritual leadership may be developed from its present status as a concept into a paradigm which is sustainable (Crossman, 2008), applicable and relevant for the literature of organizational management and leadership.

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