

The "S" Factor in Leadership Education, Practice, and Research

KARIN KLENKE

Regent University
Virginia Beach, Virginia

Until recently, it commonly was believed that there is no place for spirituality within science, politics, business, or academia. However, over the past decade, the business and popular presses have been inundated with a flood of books and articles addressing the role of spirituality in the workplace. When God makes the front page of *Fortune Magazine* (Gunther, 2001), the business community takes notice. Corporations and their leaders have begun to recognize the importance of the workplace in promoting spiritual growth. As a result, tapping the human soul at work has become a flourishing business. The burgeoning interest in spirituality is reflected in a flood of books and journals and the proliferation of conferences, workshops, and seminars on the topic. Conlin (1999) concluded that "a spiritual revival is sweeping across corporate America as executives of all stripes are mixing mysticism into their management, importing into office corridors the lessons usually doled out in churches, temples, and mosques" (p. 150).

Leadership researchers, practitioners, and educators are participating in the dialogue and bringing a diversity of approaches and viewpoints to the discussion. For example, Covey (1994) talked about the spiritual renaissance of the business world; the World Bank,

ABSTRACT. Leadership scholars are confronted with the challenges of integrating spirituality into existing theories of leadership and developing new models that incorporate the leader's spiritual self and ontological power. These challenges call for multidisciplinary research in both quantitative and qualitative traditions and beg for collaboration between leadership scholars, practitioners, and educators to integrate spiritual perspectives into leadership education, practice, and research.

under the leadership of Richard Barrett, launched the Spiritual Unfoldment Society; Zohar and Marshall (2000) discussed the concept of spiritual intelligence; Vaill (1996) saw spirituality as a requisite of visionary leadership; and Hawley (1995) expressed the belief that spirituality is at the very core of leadership. A common theme in these publications is the notion that the workplace has helped transform spirituality from a personal pursuit into a business practice.

Although some have argued that much of this literature is anecdotal, it does suggest that the roots of effective leadership may be grounded in a spiritual dimension. Given the assumption that spiritually anchored leadership can add value to an organization by helping workers and managers align personal and organizational values around their understanding of spirituality, this factor is beginning to be recognized as impor-

tant in the overall development of a leader. According to this view, common characteristics of effective leaders are an inward focus, potential for self-discovery, reflective analysis, and personal reinvention.

The Leadership Educator

Pedagogical issues surrounding the teaching of spirituality are diverse and complex. In leadership studies, we have pondered for years whether and how leadership can be taught. The same questions arise as leadership and business educators are experimenting with teaching spirituality. Can the subject matter be taught in the classroom through traditional teaching methods? Assuming that spirituality can be taught as an academic subject, how can knowledge of spirituality be acquired through personal reflection and life experience? What is the "how" of pedagogical spirituality, and what is the context in which it must be developed? Should faculty members have formal training or qualification in spirituality? Spirituality now is being taught in many different contexts—modules or courses offered by institutes, special workshops included in conference programs, think tanks, chat rooms, and formal academic programs leading to bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in leadership studies.

In certain disciplines, such as nursing and social work, in which professionals are required to have a basic understanding of patients' and clients' spiritual needs, courses on spirituality have been incorporated into academic curricula. Elsewhere, faculty members also are beginning to include spirituality in courses in areas such as business, management, organizational development, and public administration (Neal, 1997) or are teaching separate courses. Spirituality courses are offered in a variety of formats targeting different populations, such as MBAs and senior executives. As one educator noted, more courses on budgeting, strategic planning, niche marketing, lean management, or even business ethics will not do. What is needed, instead, are educational leaders who are willing to plumb the depths of their inner wisdom and contemplate the deepest values that they hold for themselves and their students to bridge the gap between private and public expressions of spirituality.

When teaching spirituality, educators face a number of challenges. One obstacle originates from the subjective nature of the concept itself. Spirituality is a mosaic of many different aspects of the human existence and means different things to different people. Cawley (1997) noted that spirituality has become polarized—one end representing religious or faith-based spiritualities and the other embodying secular spiritualities. Just as practitioners are faced with employees who bring a multitude of spiritualities to the workplace, leadership educators are confronted with students who bring different spiritualities to the classroom. Students may be committed to the practice of their faith, antireligious, nurturers of their own spirituality, or individuals who never gave the issue much thought and enroll in the course to see "how the shoe fits" or because of the novelty value of spirituality courses.

For many students, spirituality remains a very personal matter. They do not like to discuss it in the classroom, nor are they keen to have their spirituality measured through questionnaires. Teaching spirituality requires building a safe environment for the expression of diversity, sensitivity, creativity, and dif-

ferent kinds of spiritualities. A module or program need not address several dimensions under the umbrella of spirituality, but it must not be perceived as dogmatic, prescriptive, or offensive to those individuals who do not have a religious affiliation.

The Leadership Practitioner

Spirituality in the Workplace

Increasingly, there are voices making the case for open discussion of faith, God, spirituality, and religion in organizations, public schools, and civic forums (Carter, 1994). Many practitioners, line managers, consultants, human resource specialists, and workers at every level in organizations are bringing matters of spirit into public discourse. In recent years, managers have come to realize the importance of spirituality in leading organizations and individuals. The discourse of spirituality and organizations, reflected in the recent spurt of publications and the growing number of spirituality-in-business conferences, suggests that employees are searching for greater meaning in their workplaces. Spirituality at work has appeared, in part, because people want to feel connected to their work and believe that that is more important than the value of a paycheck. Likewise, they want to feel connected with each other at work in the pursuit of a transcendent purpose (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000).

The purpose of spirituality, as Rosner (2001) noted, is not to serve work. The purpose of work is to serve spirituality. It is about experiencing a sense of purpose and meaning in work beyond the performance of tasks and a sense of contributing to the greater community. In spiritually based firms there is a pronounced emphasis on selecting persons who are most likely to be comfortable and productive with a spiritual corporate culture (Wagner-Marsch & Conley, 1999). In these organizations, managers and employees believe that making work a spiritual pursuit can help restore wholeness and virtue to a fragmented work force and society. Furthermore, Nadesan (1999) presented evidence that a spiritually sensitive work environment can enhance productivity by facilitating employees' commitments to organiza-

tional goals. A number of companies have adopted programs to accommodate spiritual concerns of their employees. Others, such as Southwest Airlines, Chick-fil-A, and Tom's of Maine operate from a strong spiritual basis (Nash, 1994) or have taken on the status of quasireligious corporations (Bromley, 1998). According to Bromley, in quasireligious corporations such as Mary Kay Cosmetics, Herbalife, Amway, and ServiceMaster, an evangelical Christian ideology has been instituted to form workers into a "tightly knit social network" that is "legitimated symbolically by appeals to transcendent purposes" (p. 350) and that "serves as a vehicle for integrating important spheres of life that have become disintegrated" (p. 359). Central to the eventual success of these companies in pursuing a spiritually oriented workplace is the role of leadership.

For leadership practitioners, the transformational and "emancipatory" qualities of spirituality, if enlisted for organizational purposes, have been tied primarily to organizational change efforts (Frost & Egri, 1994), leadership qualities (Moxley, 2000), and empowerment. Traditionally, economic or technological considerations were the driving forces for implementing major organizational changes that led to new economies of scale and higher productivity. Only recently has spirituality been considered as a driver of productivity. For example, Neck and Milliman (1994) cited research pointing to a number of benefits of practicing spirituality at work. These include heightened individual creativity, intuition, organizational innovation, self-actualization, and teamwork. There is also some evidence that spiritually anchored organizations add shareholder value. Thompson (2000), for instance, reported that organizational performance and financial success can depend on the spiritual enrichment of the workplace and that "spirited workplaces" have done better with respect to profitability and thereby have added to shareholder value.

Delbecq (1999), in interviews with Silicon Valley executives who were asked to talk about the sources of their inner strength and wisdom that inform their leadership, revealed the following

themes: (a) an orientation to work as a calling that adds a sense of vitality and purpose to the leadership journey; (b) integration of, rather than separation between, the "private life of spirit" and the "public life of work"; and (c) the courage to stay the course and survive with dignity the special challenges of executive leadership. For these executives, spirituality is the integrative force enabling them to engage in business leadership as a form of human service. Taken together, these studies suggest that spirituality, which is shared in the work community, can be beneficial because it provides a nurturing environment for productive and sustaining economic and social relationships.

Undoubtedly, for many practitioners the exploration of spirit at work raises several flags: Is this another leadership fad? Is it old wine in new bottles? Is it another weapon in the hands of those who seek to control and manipulate the minds and actions of others? Is it the next round of cannon fodder for management and leadership gurus? The answer to some of these questions is probably "yes." There already have been reports in the press of managerial and organizational abuses that have followed the unethical or ill-conceived application of ideas about spirituality to workplace issues. Skeptics of the spirituality-at-work movement see it as simply the most recent means through which commitments to the organization are brokered and achieved (Elmes & Smith, 2001). If organizations and the workplace become a focal context for the exploration of spiritual needs and growth, practitioners play an important role in spiritual sense making and creating a context in which this can occur. However, they must do so in an ethical, spiritual values-based, socially responsible way.

In addition to the specter of fads, there are implementation problems that cast shadows over spiritual development programs at the workplace. In most organizations, we can expect to find employees with many different kinds of spiritualities, which raises the question of whether organizations should strive for the development of an orientation targeted to the whole firm or try to accommodate and encourage expressions of spiritualities unique to

each individual. After a series of studies, Mitroff and Denton (1999) proposed an organization-based approach. More specifically, the authors suggested that because there are many conflicting preferences and interests among individuals with regard to spiritual practices, it would not be possible to promote spirituality on an individual basis; rather, the organization as a whole should develop a spiritually anchored climate. This view treats the organization as the sum total of the spiritual selves of its members. On the other hand, the individual-centered perspective favors allowing and encouraging each person to express his or her personal spirituality. This approach suggests that organizational leaders should make an effort to understand and accept the uniqueness of each person's spiritual self. Laabs (1995) summed up the arguments surrounding the two approaches by stating, "if we try to squeeze spirituality into our existing molds to validate it, we may squeeze out the very gifts—including challenging our paradigms which spirituality in the workplace can give us" (p. 64).

The Leadership Scholar

Some have argued that spirituality is a new notion in leadership, whereas others have suggested that the two constructs have been connected throughout history. From a historical perspective, spirituality as an expression of purpose and commitment to a high ideal is not new. Politics, social movements, the arts, and humanities have witnessed spiritual leaders who transformed their fields. Fairholm (1997, 1998) was one of the first leadership scholars who put spirituality and leadership together. The author suggested that "spiritual leadership is a holistic approach that considers the full capacities, needs and interests of both leader and led; spiritual leaders see leadership as a contextual relationship in which all participants want to grow and help others in their self-development activities" (1998, p. 111). Fairholm went on to suggest that the "spiritual leadership process includes building community within the group and a sense of personal spiritual wholeness in both leader and led. Spiritual leaders set and live by a higher moral standard and ask others

to share that standard" (p. 40). Part of this community building includes vision setting, sharing, creating meaning, and sense making. The author identified eight elements in the spiritual leadership process. These elements, which are dynamically interrelated and manifest themselves in leader-follower interactivity, include community, competence, stewardship, servanthood, visioning, and high moral standards—all of which have been discussed in leadership literature.

In view of this description of spiritual leadership, it comes as no surprise that leadership scholars have looked at transforming and transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978) to guide the development of linkages between the two constructs. Burns, in his groundbreaking work, proposed that transforming leaders transcend their own interests and needs for the sake of the followers, which motivates them to pursue higher moral standards. Expanding on the work of Burns, Bass (1985) purported that in an organizational context, transformational leadership that is moral implies influencing change consistent with ethical principles and articulating consciousness about authentic needs and choices. The work on transformational leadership raises questions such as, "Do transformational leaders integrate spirituality into their leadership style?" and "Does transformational leadership encompass a spiritual dimension derived from core elements of spirituality such as transcendence, connectedness, or relational bonding?" Nevertheless, research has not identified or explicated the nature of the relationships between spirituality and leadership. The few studies that explored the link between transformational leadership and spirituality, through use of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) and a number of different measures of spirituality, produced inconsistent results.

Attempts to incorporate or integrate spirituality into existing leadership theories raise myriad challenges and problems for the leadership scholar. Two particular challenges that fall into the domain of the scholar are (a) construct definitions of spirituality as they

relate to leadership and (b) measurement issues.

Construct Definitions of Spirituality

Definitions of spirituality mirror the multiple definitions of leadership discussed by Rost (1991). These definitions attempt to identify an ageless phenomenon that often defies paradigm assumptions, cognitions, and boundaries. Like leadership, spirituality is difficult to define, in part because of the multidimensional nature of the construct. Conger (1994) asserted that "spirituality, like leadership, is a very hard concept to pin down. These are probably two of the vaguest words you can find in our language, and when you put them together you get something even vaguer" (p. 27). Other researchers claimed that no words in our human language are adequate or accurate when applied to spiritual realities (Gibbons, 2000). Thus, it comes as no surprise that consensus on the meaning of leadership or spirituality remains elusive.

Leadership involves relationships, connectedness, power, influence, and transformation—characteristics that also are echoed in our spiritual experiences. Spirituality is, for example, associated with a belief in relating oneself to a higher-order influence. For many, spirituality is the essence of an individual, his or her inner being, the real self. Beyond that, most definitions of spirituality also acknowledge a dimension that is non-physical, unbound by time and place, that transcends our five senses but is every bit as real as the physical realm.

Spirituality often is defined by what it is not. Spirituality, for example, is not religion. Nor is it unique to a particular religion or culture. Organized religion looks outward; depends on rites and scripture; and tends to be dogmatic, exclusive, and narrowly based on a formalized set of beliefs and practices. Spirituality, on the other hand, looks inward, tends to be inclusive and more universally applicable, and embraces diverse expressions of interconnectedness. Spirituality is usually perceived as allowing for and supporting religious beliefs, whereas the reverse is not always the case. As Fairholm (1997) pointed out, spiritual-

ity does not apply to particular religions, although the values of some religions may be part of a person's spiritual orientation. Although religiosity and spirituality describe different concepts, they are not fully independent.

Most definitions of spirituality emphasize relational aspects, connections "to the presence of a higher power that affects the way in which one operates in the world, inner motivations, or our response to a deep and mysterious human yearning for self-transcendence and surrender, a yearning to find our place" (Benner, 1989, p. 20). Although a mystical power—most of the time transcendent—is mentioned, an absence of religious dogma is apparent that reflects a variety of ontological and epistemological assumptions. Transcendence is construed broadly in these definitions, not necessarily toward a god or higher power but certainly beyond the narrow, selfish confines of the ego. Furthermore, most definitions of spirituality imply the pursuit of the highest values commensurate with one's particular calling, personality, culture, and religious orientation (Götz, 1997). The breadth and variations of definitions of spirituality offer multiple vantage points for creating connections with leadership constructs (Cowan, 2002).

Measurement Issues

The leadership scholar is challenged by the diverse, conflicting, and often overlapping definitions of spirituality as well as measurement issues that concern the ways in which this construct is operationalized. There are currently over 150 instruments that purport to measure spirituality/religiosity, ranging from measures of spiritual intelligence to instruments that measure spiritual well-being and transcendence. Hill and Hood (1999) recently edited a compendium describing 125 measures of spirituality and religion. Though researchers have been refining measures of leadership for over 50 years, measures of spirituality, for the most part, have yet to achieve comparable psychometric qualities and often have serious problems such as lack of validity, response bias, scale redundancy, and ceiling effects. Much empirical

work needs to be done in exploring the convergence among these various measures as a way of testing the broader conceptual frameworks underlying the instruments.

Conclusions

The corporate world's growing interest in spirituality, especially in relation to leadership, poses many challenges. If spiritual constructs add value to the study of leadership, scholars, practitioners, and educators need to begin to document the added conceptual, empirical, practical, and educational values that these constructs provide. Successful integration of leadership and spirituality requires a transformation of the nature of work and the role of top management. Undoubtedly, organizational leaders will encounter difficulties in their attempts to create spiritually anchored organizations. Moreover, most managers' and business leaders' training and development leave them unprepared to be instrumental or supportive of employees' search for meaning or transcendence or to serve as spiritual guides at the workplace. During a time of downsizing and lack of job security and loyalty, people are hungry for meaning in their lives. Spiritual leadership is one avenue for satisfying this hunger because it allows individuals and organizations to discover ways to connect their work lives with their spiritual lives.

If spirituality were to become the next frontier in leadership thinking, elucidating the emotional, cognitive, and motivational underpinnings of spirituality would do a great service. If the integration of leadership and spirituality can be achieved, it may provide many solutions for a society currently turning to spirit. This calls for multidisciplinary research in both the quantitative and qualitative traditions and begs for collaboration with practitioners. If successful corporate leaders of the 21st century are indeed spiritual leaders, paradigms of spirituality must be reflected in the work of leadership scholars, practitioners, and educators. At present, however, spirituality, like leadership, remains mysterious and elusive in many aspects.

REFERENCES

- Ashmos, D., & Duchon, D. (2000). Spirituality at work. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 9(2), 134-145.
- Bass, B. (1985). *Performance beyond expectations*. New York: The Free Press.
- Benner, D. (1989). Toward a psychology of spirituality: Implications for personality and psychotherapy. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, 5, 19-30.
- Bromley, D. (1998). Transformative movements and quasi-religious corporations. In N. Deme, P. Hill, T. Schmitt, & R. Williams (Eds.), *Sacred companies: Organizational aspects of religion and religious aspects of organizations* (pp. 349-363). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Burns, J. (1978). *Leadership*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Carter, S. (1994). *The culture of disbelief*. New York: Basic Books.
- Cawley, N. (1997). An exploration of the concept of spirituality. *Journal of Palliative Nursing*, 3(1), 31-36.
- Conger, J. (1994). *Spirit at work: Discovering spirituality in leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Conlin, M. (1999, November 1). Religion in the workplace: The growing presence of spirituality in corporate America. *Business Week*, 150-152.
- Covey, S. (1994). *The 7 habits of highly effective people*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Cowan, D. (2002). *Translating spiritual intelligence into leadership competencies*. Paper presented at the Academy of Management Conference, Denver, CO.
- Delbecq, A. (1999). Christian spirituality and contemporary business leadership. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 12(4), 345-349.
- Elmes, M., & Smith, C. (2001). Moved by the spirit: Contextualizing workplace empowerment in American spiritual ideals. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 3(1), 33-50.
- Fairholm, G. (1997). *Capturing the heart of leadership*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Fairholm, G. (1998). *Perspectives on leadership: From the science of management to its spiritual heart*. Westport, CT: Quorum Books.
- Frost, P., & Egri, C. (1994). The Shamanic perspective on organizational change and development. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 7, 1-23.
- Gibbons, P. (2000). *Spirituality at work: Definitions, measures, assumptions, and validity claims*. Paper presented at the Academy of Management Conference, Toronto, CA.
- Götz, I. (1997). *On spirituality and teaching*. Retrieved from <www.ed.uiuc.edu/EPS/PES-yearbook97_docs/gotz.html>.
- Gunther, M. (2001, July 9). God and business: The surprising quest for spiritual renewal in the American workplace. *Fortune*, 58-80.
- Hawley, R. (1995). *Reawakening spirit in work*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Hill, P., & Hood, R. (1999). *Measures of religiosity*. Birmingham AL: Religious Education Press.
- Laabs, J. (1995). Balancing spirituality and work. *Personnel Journal*, September, 60-76.
- Mitroff, I., & Denton, E. (1999). A study of spirituality in the workplace. *Sloan Management Review*, 40(4), 83-96.
- Moxley, R. (2000). *Leadership and spirit: Breathing new vitality and energy into individuals and organizations*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Nadesan, M. (1999). The discourses of corporate spiritualism and evangelical capitalism. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 13(1), 3-43.
- Nash, L. (1994). *Believers in business*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers.
- Neal, J. (1997). Spirituality in management education: A guide to resources. *Journal of Management Education*, 28, 121-139.
- Neck, C., & Milliman, J. (1994). Thought self-leadership: Finding spiritual fulfillment in organizational life. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 9(6), 9-16.
- Rosner, J. (2001). Is there room for the soul at work? *Workforce*, 80(2), 82-83.
- Rost, J. (1991). *Leadership for the twenty-first century*. New York: Praeger.
- Thompson, D. (2000). Can you train people to be spiritual? *Training and Development*, 54(12), 18-19.
- Vaill, P. (1996). *Spiritual learning and leading: Proven wisdom for a new age*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Wagner-Marsh, F., & Conley, J. (1999). The fourth wave: The spiritually based firm. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 12(4), 292-301.
- Zohar, D., & Marshall, I. (2000). *Spiritual intelligence: The ultimate intelligence*. New York: Bloomsbury.

Copyright of Journal of Education for Business is the property of Heldref Publications and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.