

Spirituality and Leadership: Can They Coexist?

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We are living in an unparalleled time in history, one in which the world is in a state of rapid and evolutionary change. This rapid change is creating the perception of powerlessness in the lives of many people, causing them to search for purpose, meaning, community and connectedness where they spend a significant proportion of their time and energy—the workplace. At the same time, the workplace has become an unstable, insecure environment, making many workplaces unfriendly (Brandt, 1996). Nonetheless, according to Dehler & Welsh (1994), with the decreased influence of extended families, civic groups and churches, the workplace is becoming increasingly central to employees personal growth, fulfillment and ultimately their physical existence (Korac-Kakabadse, Kouzmin & Kakabadse, 2002; Krishnakumar & Neck, 2002).

Today's workforce has shifted its purpose from simply working to earn a living to having careers that allow expression and impact the world (Neal, 2000). Subsequently, workers are questioning the relationship between meaning in life and meaning in work (Neal, Lichtenstein, & Banner, 1999), and increasingly seeking employment that is inspiring and consequential (Mitroff and Denton, 1999b). This search for meaning and connectedness aligns individuals with that which makes them distinctly human--their spirituality. There are several suppositions for this change. Some posit globalization has sparked much of this change (Jukiewicz & Giacalone, 2004). Specifically, Eck (2001) asserts the growing interest in Eastern philosophies that promote integration between self and the environment may be fostering spirituality in the workplace. In addition,

many employees are feeling demoralized and experiencing spiritual confusion as a result of downsizing (Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2004) and reengineering (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). Mitroff and Denton (1999b), posits the interest in spirituality is simply a reactive response to recent social and business quandaries that have resulted in alienated employees and organizations' goal to reconnect with employees. Last, Marques, Dhiman and King (2005), note it may be that as baby boomers move closer to the end of life's journey, there is more interest in contemplating life's meaning. More importantly, surveys of leaders and managers confirm the need for a workplace culture, leadership and work processes that acknowledge the whole person with emotional and intellectual needs, desires and a spirit (Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2004; Fairholm, 1997; Mitroff & Denton, 1999b). The current paper will examine the historical issues surrounding the study of spirituality and organizational science. This is followed by look at the positive impact of spirituality on organizational outcomes. Last, the importance of spirituality on leader behavior and success will be revealed.

#### *Historical Foundations of Spirituality and Organizational Science*

Although it is generally accepted that spirituality is an important component of humanness, the concept has been historically neglected as a feasible topic in organizational research. According to Mitroff and Denton (1999a), spirituality is often viewed as "too soft, too nebulous and too ill-formed for serious academic study" (p. 84). Benefiel (2003a) posits that the root of the dilemma resides in the philosophical issues that beset western culture since the rise of modern science and the Enlightenment. Subsequently, "western

philosophers have mainly focused on the pragmatic, empirical, analytical studies and have basically rejected interpretative knowledge” (Krahne, Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003, p.400). Accordingly, the evolution of the Enlightenment was a rebellion against religion and impersonal objectivity. On one hand, this assisted humanity to move beyond superstition and the domination of churches. On the other, it separated humanity from what is the greatest and most important element in being human (Neal & Biberman, 2003). As a result, today “science discourse and the discourse of spirituality dwell together in an atmosphere of mutual denial of significance and validity” (Wilber, 1998, p.4). However, it appears change is imminent as evidenced by the special issues of journals published (*The Leadership Quarterly* (2005); *American Behavioral Scientist* (2000); *Journal of Management Education* (2000)), and the number of books (Eck, 2001; Mitroff & Denton, 1999; Fairholm, 1997) written on the topic.

#### *Spirituality and Organizational Outcomes*

In addition to the social and organizational imperatives to move this area of inquiry to the realm of scientific research, is the fact that evidence suggests spirituality may impact organizational effectiveness (Krahne, Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003). There appears to be a high correlation between spiritual well being and organizational openness, self–efficacy and organizational commitment (Trott, 1996; Leigh, 1997). Beazley, (1997) found a correlation between a high level of spirituality and honesty, humility and service to others. Lloyd (1990) found organizations high in workplace spirituality out perform those without it by eighty-six percent. A link has also been established between workplace

spirituality and individual creativity (Freshman, 1999). More recently, Miliman and Czaplewski (2003) found a positive correlation exist between intrinsic work satisfaction and job involvement. Additionally, Jurkiewicz and Giacalone (2004) found organizations high in workplace spirituality grow faster, increase efficiencies, and produce higher rates of return on investments.

For leaders, spirituality expresses itself not in words or preaching, but in the embodiment of spiritual values such as integrity (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2004). In other words, spirituality exists in your spiritual behavior, your lifestyle and interaction with others. According to Reave (2005), many believe there is a conflict between the values and practices emphasized by spirituality and those needed for leader success. However, it appears that the research findings suggest otherwise. Spiritual values such as integrity, honesty, caring and concern as well as humility have been repeatedly found to be significant elements of leader success (Yukl, 1999; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Mayfield & Mayfield, 2002).

According to Kakabadse, Kouzmin and Kakabadse (2002), spirituality implies something tangible beyond the self, and rejects past leadership models that focused on values of self-interest. Spirituality causes leaders to focus on “ethical values of integrity, independence and justice” (p.173). By engaging in spiritual leadership, leaders can effectively facilitate : (a) building shared values, (b) vision setting, (c) shared meaning, (d) enabling, (e) influence and power, (f) intuition, (g) service, and (g) transformation.

Further, there are four attributes commonly used to define spirituality and these attributes correlate with spiritual values that are important to leader success: a) innerness or inner resources, b) transcendence, c) purpose and meaning in life and d) unifying interconnectedness.

Innerness or inner resources. Howden (1993) defines innerness as striving for or discovering wholeness, identity and a sense of empowerment. It is manifested in feelings of strength in times of crisis. It is a sense of peace when dealing with uncertainty. According to Ashmos & Duchon (2000), inner resources allow us to comprehend one's own divine power and how to use that power to live a more satisfying and fulfilling outer life, which translates to a more meaningful work life.

Transcendence. Behavior is transcendent when it overrides environmental contingencies or apparent personal limits. According to Bateman and Porath (2003) transcendent behavior is "self-determined behavior that overrides constraining personal or environmental factors and effects extraordinary (positive) change" (p.123). For leaders, this behavior is evidenced when people effect change by exceeding demands, overcoming restraints, and seizing opportunities. Transcendence is driven by intrinsic motivating factors. Intrinsic motivation involves feelings on personal interest, enjoyment and according to Csikszentmihalyi (1997), flow. Flow is the sense of effortless action one feels in moments that stand out as the best in their lives. It occurs when an individual's skills are totally involved in overcoming a challenge that is almost manageable. Thus, work is more meaningful when organizations' leaders foster strong

linkages between what we do, who we are and why we are here, while concurrently connecting employees to something greater than themselves (Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi & Damon, 2001).

Purpose and meaning in life. People have a common desire to find a deeper purpose, or meaning in their lives and in their work. This perceived sense of purpose may derive from the intrinsic qualities of the work itself, goals realized or sought, values and or the beliefs that work is thought to serve. Pratt and Ashforth (2003) define meaning as a subjective sense that people make of their work. Some suggest meaning is a tool used by individuals for imposing stability on life (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002). Similarly, Howden defines purpose as the process of searching for or discovering events or relationships that provide a sense of worth, and/or reason for existence. As their work lives evolve, people strive to fulfill needs for purpose, values, efficacy and self worth (Baumeister, 1991). The expression of spirituality at work requires leaders' understanding that employees want to be involved in work that gives meaning to their lives (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). Leaders can foster meaningfulness by creating a better person-job fit. Work subsequently becomes more meaningful when there is an alignment between employee roles and his/her values.

Unifying Interconnectedness. The workplace is a community. Feeling part of a community is an essential element of spiritual development. Understanding spirituality at work is acknowledging that people have both an inner and an outer life. Leaders foster community by building consensus and leading within a framework of common vision (Fairholm, 1996). Further, leaders inspire shared

community by creating meaning and engaging the heart of employees. The nourishment of the inner life can lead to a more meaningful and productive outer life (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). Spirituality at work has grown primarily because people want to feel connected to work that is important, and connected to each other. When people are at work, connections with others represent the fabric of their daily lives (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003).

Spirituality in leadership was explicit throughout history. However, in the last century it became implicit only now to resurface as a viable complement to existing leadership theory. Korac-Kakabadse, Kouzmin & Kakabadse (2002) reveals spirituality creates an attitude of discernment rather than intervention; an attitude of acceptance rather than control; an attitude of letting go rather than holding on; an attitude of listening rather than doing, and an attitude of humility rather than competence and competition. Most importantly, it creates an environment for leader and organizational success.

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