SPIRITUALITY AND LEADERSHIP AMONG COLLEGE FRESHMEN

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Over a century ago, Ralph Waldo Emerson bragged to Henry Thoreau that "at Harvard they teach all branches of learning." Thoreau responded, "Yes, but they don't teach the roots" (Jacobs, 1991, p. 277). This sort of commentary continues to this day as a growing number of scholars and practitioners argue that the roots of effective leadership are grounded in the spiritual dimension of individual leaders (e.g., Conger, 1994; Marcic, 1997; Mitroff & Denton, 1999).

While hundreds of articles and books about spirituality and the workplace are now appearing, most are theory-based or anecdotal (Strack, 2001). Very little quantitative and empirical research exists in this subject area. Part of the problem is that spirituality is a complex, abstract, and multidimensional construct that has little consensus among leading scholars. However, Gibbons (1999) has pointed out that no matter which concept of spirituality is espoused (e.g., mystical, religious, or secular), they all involve beliefs, values, and practices that must be lived out by an individual with consistency to be spiritual.

One obvious area in which spirituality might be lived out consistently is through leadership. Indeed, most leadership scholars assert that a major determinant or motivation for taking on leadership is derived from some source beyond the individual leader; for example, a higher power, a set of immutable spiritual beliefs or values, or a set of higher-level human values (Bolman & Deal, 2001; Conger, 1994; Kanungo & Mendonca, 1996; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Moxley, 2000). This source provides the foundation for the leader's relationship with self and with others. Effective leaders possess, recognize, and use the spiritual dimension of human existence to

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benefit others in their organizations and communities. Many decades ago McClelland conceptualized this relationship by describing leaders using "socialized power" for the benefit of others rather than "individualized power" for the benefit of self (McClelland & Burnham, 2003).

This current study explores the possible link between spirituality and leadership. Data were collected from over 700 college freshman. They completed the student version of the Leadership Practices Inventory (Kouzes & Posner, 2005) and the Spirituality Assessment Scale (Beazley, 1997). The analysis will investigate how leadership practices and dimensions of spirituality are related among college freshman.

There has been much recent interest in the spirituality of young people (cf. Cannister, 1999; Groen, 2001; Grytting, 2003; Klenke, 2003; Manning, 2001; Schafer, 1997; Smith, 2003). The Higher Education Research Institute (2005) recently launched a national study of student spirituality. It suggested that spirituality points to our interior self (our subjective life) as contrasted to the objective domain of material events and objects. Spirituality is reflected in the values and ideals that we hold most dear, our sense of who we are and where we come from, our beliefs about why we are here – the meaning and purpose we see in our lives – and our connectedness to each other and to the world around us.

Their study acknowledged that each student viewed spirituality in a unique way. The preliminary report found that students place a high value on spirituality broadly defined. For example, 70% say people can grow spiritually without being religious, and 88% say non-religious people can lead lives that are just as moral as religious values dictate. In addition, spirituality was associated with positive physical and psychological health, optimism, sense of personal empowerment, civic responsibility, empathy, racial and ethnic awareness and tolerance, academic performance, and satisfaction with college.

LEADERSHIP AND SPIRITUALITY

Spirituality and leadership may be related in at least three ways. First,

leadership is values-based and begins with exploring personal inner terri-
tory. For example, Warren Bennis (2004), commenting on Robert Green-
leaf's contribution to our understanding of leadership, notes that for
Greenleaf:

> The role of the leader, to a great extent, is *value* based. And the *main*
> value is that the leader is someone who works to create a social architec-
> ture that benefits. . .the people for whom the organization is responsible.
> (xiii)

True leaders value the welfare of those affected by the organization rather
than their own ambitions and aggrandizement.

Second, some writers (Collins, 2001) argue that humility is one of the
prime virtues of leadership. Executive Leaders, those at the apex of Collin's
leadership pyramid, combine "a paradoxical blend of personal humility and
professional will" in leading their organizations (p. 20). Third, leadership is
often characterized by selfless service to others, an approach that Greenleaf
(1977) calls "servant-leadership." The servant-leader acts out of a desire to
serve others and makes their welfare his or her driving purpose.

Leadership and Inner Territory

Scott (1994) enumerated the spiritual acts of leaders as the search for
self-understanding, willingness to embrace complexity, and connecting the
internal and external in meaningful ways. Chopra (2002) asserted that lead-
ers are not born, but are made from ordinary people who look inward to the
soul for inspiration. Fullan wrote that spirituality and leadership occur
together, "in a thousand small ways through everyday behavior" (2002, p.
12). Finally, Parker Palmer (1998) noted that leaders are persons with
unique power to create the conditions under which others must live. These
conditions can be "as illuminating as heaven or as shadowy as hell"
(Palmer, 1998, p. 200). To lead well one has to be continually aware of
personal, emotional, and spiritual health. Failure to attend to one's interior
landscape may propel the leader to decisions and actions that harm rather

than benefit others. Yet extroverts are more likely than introverts to become leaders, and success depends more on techniques to master the outer world with less emphasis on interior awareness (Palmer, 1998). Many leaders, simply by the way in which they rise to leadership positions, may have to mute their inner consciousness.

Humility

Collins (2001) described a Level 5 leader as one who blends personal humility with intense professional will. Leaders who possess these twin traits are able to transform good companies into great ones. The levels that precede Level 5 require different kinds of values and skills. Collins points out, "The great irony is that the animus and personal ambition that often drive people to become a Level 4 leader stand at odds with the humility required to rise to Level 5" (p. 75). Mexican graduate students in educational administration frequently mentioned humility as a central value in leadership essays (Slater, Boone, Fillion, Galloway, Munoz et al., 2006).

Humility is best understood as a balance between positive and negative aspects in ourselves (Kurtz & Ketcham, 1992). The two selves are not opposites, but present a "both/and" characteristic in all individuals. If one recognizes the good but understands that the negative or evil still exists, the virtue of humility is in sight. Humility begins with understanding and accepting the "self as imperfect" (p. 195). In accepting this, people are less likely to judge others because they recognize their own imperfection. Denying our imperfections, according to Bolman and Deal (2001), is "to deny our humanity and to become disconnected from our soul" (p. 67).

Leadership as Service

Robert Greenleaf offered a unique concept of leadership in which the motivation to lead arises from the desire to serve others. For Greenleaf, leadership "begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead" (1977, p. 13).

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The *servant*-first leader differs fundamentally from the person who is *leader*-first and who may be motivated to lead by an unusual need for power or ambition to accumulate material possessions. The difference between these two extremes of leadership is demonstrated by the care the servant-leader takes to ensure that other people's needs are met first. In a now classic description of the test of servant-leadership, Greenleaf writes:

> Do those served grow as persons? Do they, *while being served*, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? *And* what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or at least not be further deprived? (Greenleaf, 1977, pp. 13-14)

While there is no absolute guarantee that servant-leaders will achieve these results for others, Greenleaf asserts that they are more likely to achieve them than not—for the simple reason that the servant-leader will persevere in seeking to fulfill the needs of others.

Servant-leadership operates at both the institutional and the personal levels (Spears, 1998). At the individual level, servant-leadership provides a means of personal growth—professional, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual—-because it encourages individuals to both serve and lead others. Institutionally, servant-leadership supports a group-oriented approach to decision making as a means of strengthening both the institution and society (Spears, 1998). Servant-leadership relies on persuasion and consensus building in ways that top-down styles of leadership cannot. For these reasons experts in academia, business management, and public service believe that servant-leadership may represent the best opportunity for meaningful change in society as we move into the twenty-first century (Blanchard, 1998; Bogle, 2004; Covey, 1998; DeGraff, Tilley, & Neal, 2004; Wheatley, 2004).

Transformational Leadership

Burns (1978) discussed leadership in spiritual terms and defined trans-

forming leadership as follows: "One or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality" (p. 20). This viewpoint posits an influence that goes in two directions; the leader is open to being changed by the followers. Transformational leadership goes beyond actions of obedience or compliance to significant cognitive changes.

Kouzes and Posner (2002) have proposed a transformational theory of leadership. When leaders model the way, they exhibit a certain equality and humbleness of leadership that dignifies work. When they inspire a shared vision, they are consistent with their own values and connect them to an ennobling future for their organization. When leaders challenge the process, they are open to new ways of seeing, they question, and they pursue with courage. When leaders enable others to act, they liberate them to see and act in new ways and become leaders in their own right. When they encourage the heart, they are showing positive concern and regard for others beyond themselves.

Strack (2001) studied healthcare managers and found a significant relationship between the five practices of exemplary leaders (Kouzes & Posner, 2002) and Wilber's (1996) four-quadrant model of spiritual reality. Wilber viewed spirituality as an integration of the individual and the collective and the internal and external.

METHODOLOGY

This study investigates the relationship between the two constructs of spirituality and leadership. While leadership theories may vary on the origin, most posit at least some inner impetus to the actions of leaders. Spirituality, based upon the literature we reviewed in this article, is hypothesized to have a positive relationship with leadership. To test this hypothesis the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) and the Spirituality Assessment Scale (SAS) were administered to a convenience sample of first-year college students.

The student version of the LPI consists of 30 behaviorally-based state-

ments (Kouzes & Posner, 2005). Respondents indicate on a five-point response scale how frequently they engage in the particular behavior, with a response of "1" indicating an infrequent use of the behavior while "5" indicates a very frequent use of the leadership behavior. Five leadership scales (referred to as practices) emerge from the instrument (six statements per practice): Model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart. This instrument has been used with a variety of college student populations and has shown good reliability and validity (Posner, 2004). Internal reliability scores (Cronbach alpha) for this current study were acceptable: Model (.70), Inspire (.78), Challenge (.69), Enable (.67), and Encourage (.77).

The Spirituality Assessment Scale (SAS) has been used in the U.S., India, Australia, and England to measure individual spirituality within organizational contexts (Beazley, 1997). The instrument measures participant responses to 30 items rated on a seven-point scale on which "1" is "strongly disagree" and "7" is "strongly agree." The SAS yields two components of spirituality. The Definitive Dimension (DD) is characterized by meditation or prayer and living in a faith relationship with the Transcendent, however the Transcendent is defined by the individual. The Correlated Dimension (CD) does not define spirituality but assesses three values (humility, honesty, and service to others) which are considered essential components of spirituality. In his study of 332 graduate students, Beazley (1997) found that the definitive and correlated dimensions of spirituality were positively related with one another. Individuals high in spirituality on the DD manifested significantly more honesty, humility, and service to others than those who were low on this dimension. Cronbach coefficient alphas in this study were .93 for the Definitive Dimension and .76 for the Correlated Dimension.

In the present study the data were collected at a small, Catholic, comprehensive university located on the West Coast. The two instruments were administered to first-year students (N = 719) in the business school during a class period of a required course over a two-year period. Post-hoc

analyses revealed no statistically significant differences between the samples over the two years and hence were combined. About 56 percent of the respondents were female (N=399) and the typical student was 18-19 years old.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the correlations between the five leadership practices (LPI) and the two dimensions of spirituality (SAS). These results provide mixed support for the hypothesis about a positive relationship between these two constructs. On the one hand, none of the five leadership practices was significantly correlated with the Definitive Dimension (DD) of the spirituality scale. On the other hand, each of the five leadership practices was significantly associated ($p < .01$, two-tailed) with the Correlated Dimension (CD) of the spirituality scale, with modest correlations ranging between .23 and .41.

Table 1: *Correlation Coefficients for Leadership (LPI) and Spirituality (SAS)*

Leadership Practice	Definitive Dimension	Correlated Dimension
1. Challenge the process	.00	.26**
2. Inspire a shared vision	.03	.23**
3. Enable others to act	.06	.41**
4. Model the way	.05	.34**
5. Encourage the heart	.06	.31**

** $p < .01$ (two-sided)

Modest support for the hypothesized relationship between leadership and spirituality was found. Each of the five dimensions of transformational leadership was significantly correlated with the CD dimension of the spirituality construct, which represents the actions related to honesty, humility,

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and service to others. At the same time, none of the leadership dimensions was significantly correlated with the DD dimension of prayer and meditation of the spirituality instrument. It does not appear that college students who view themselves as engaging in leadership behaviors necessarily also view themselves as having a "faith relationship with the Transcendent" or frequently engaging in prayer or meditation. In other words, leadership actions were related to a humanistic aspect of spirituality (as assessed on the Correlated Dimension) but unrelated to the non-secular outlook (Definitive Dimension) on the part of the respondents. These results raise several issues for further discussion.

There is evidence in various leadership constructs for how a connection between humanistic ideals (as assessed by the Correlated Dimension of spirituality) and transformational leadership could be found. Transformational leadership has been centrally concerned with the moral and motivational effects of the leader on the followers as well as the changes in the leader (Burns, 1978). Bass recently changed his view that charismatic leadership could be put to either good or evil uses when he distinguished between authentic and pseudo-transformational leadership (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). The leader acts in accordance with values that can be related to the four components of Bass's transformational leadership theory: (1) idealized influence of followers assumes morally uplifting values on the part of the leader; (2) inspirational motivation focuses on the best in people; (3) intellectual stimulation includes a spiritual dimension and is open to questioning assumptions; and (4) individualized consideration represents an altruistic concern with the well-being of followers.

The same connection to spirituality can be seen in the work of Kouzes and Posner (2002). Challenging the process is similar to intellectual stimulation; leaders are open to new ways of seeing, they question, and they pursue with courage. Inspiring a shared vision is similar to inspirational motivation; leaders are consistent with their own values and connect them to an ennobling mission of the organization. When leaders enable others, they liberate them to see and act in new ways. Modeling the way is similar

to idealized influence; leaders exhibit a certain equality and humbleness of leadership that dignifies work. Encouraging the heart is similar to individualized consideration; leaders are showing positive concern for others.

For Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) the major ethical leadership problem is self-interest. The pseudo-transformational leader puts self-interest ahead of the group or the mission. Price (2003) identifies other problems. The leader may be tempted by the expediency of finding effective solutions that please followers but are not consistent with values. The leader may try to act above the law in pursuit of these follower-pleasing goals.

Leaders may not have the reasoning ability or developmental capacity to adequately deal with moral issues (Kohlberg, 1981). In some cases they revert to a simplistic approach in an attempt to drive out uncertainty.

The literature does not provide much evidence for why a connection to the Definitive Dimension of spirituality and transformational leadership should be found. It is possible that the more rigid set of beliefs (perhaps even moralistic or dogmatic) that are required to support a faith in the Transcendent are in conflict with transformational leadership attitudes associated with openness (or nonbelief), the questioning of assumptions, and diversity. In an Old Testament sense of praying that one's enemies are destroyed in a terrible manner, it could be argued that an individual could be high on the Definitive Dimension of spirituality and low on transformational leadership.

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

Foremost, these findings may have resulted from an overly narrow definition of spirituality. Religious leaders often make explicit reference to God, prayer, and religious works such as the Bible. Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech used the language of the Old Testament to express a longing for justice. Such leadership capacities suggest and move us toward a broader definition of spirituality in leadership.

Russ Moxley (2000) says that "being spiritual is about being fully

human, about integrating all the energies that are a part of us. It is about connecting to that life force that defines us and connects us" (p. 24). The spirit is manifested through individuation, interpersonal relations, community, and organizations where there is meaning and engagement, and where life and work are not separated.

This spirituality includes religion, God, and prayer, but is not limited to these categories. It can include anyone who believes that life is more than meets the eye or touches the hand, who longs to experience new possibilities for goodness and truth, and who practices thoughtful reflection.

Other reports of college students are consistent with this broad definition of spirituality when they show a relatively vague (or quite broad) definition of spirituality, and one that is not very religiously-oriented (HERI, 2005); future studies might employ other assessments of spirituality rather than the SAS, which has this strong emphasis on belief in a supreme being and the practice of prayer. Indeed, the findings in this study seem to support the view of students (generally) that one can be spiritual but not traditionally religious or engage in traditional religious practices.

The particular population being investigated may also have contributed to these findings. College freshman (18- to 19-year-old men and women) may not possess sufficient experience with either leadership or with spirituality to justify the expectation of a very strong relationship between these concepts. Martin Luther King, Gandhi, and Desmond Tutu were spiritual leaders who dedicated their lives to justice and the betterment of their followers. They were Level V leaders in Collins' terms (2001). Leaders at this level may have integrated a spirituality that puts prayer and the transcendent at the center. But those at other levels of Collins' scale are not necessarily humble and may be less spiritual in traditional terms.

Indeed, that any correlation was found with college students suggests that the relationship between these two constructs might be more robust with more mature groups. This premise deserves future investigations with populations with both more life and work experiences. Even studies involving more diverse populations of college students would seem war-

ranted, as this particular sample was limited to a single college campus. The idea of maturing spirituality could be examined by studying this sample of students further. As they progress through their collegiate experience they might achieve a higher integration of spirituality and leadership.

Expanding the investigation of collegiate leadership and spirituality outside of the United States could explore cultural variables. For example, Slater, Boone, Fillion, Galloway, Munoz, Base, and Korth (2003) studied a Mexican population of college students. They found significant correlations between the correlated dimension (CD) of spirituality and two of the leadership practices: modeling the way and enabling others to act. No relationship was found (as with the current study) between the five leadership practices and the definitive dimension (DD) of spirituality.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms a relationship between leadership and some aspects of spirituality, but not others. Several values theorized as being essential components of spirituality (honesty, humility, and service to others) were clearly correlated with leadership behaviors and actions. That is, those individuals who embraced these values the most also reported taking more leadership actions. Previously, researchers have suggested a relationship between values and leadership but have not postulated if there were any particular values that mattered more than others. These findings open up a possible new research avenue.

The aspect of spirituality associated with prayer and belief in the Transcendent was not correlated one way or the other with engaging in leadership behaviors. Future researchers may want to use other spirituality assessments, and in this process, broaden their definition of spirituality or what being spiritual means in action. Utilizing more diverse populations than first-year college students, including international samples, is also necessary in order to better understand both constructs as well as how they might be related to one another.

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