

Workplace Spirituality, Spiritual Leadership and Performance Excellence

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A major change is taking place in the personal and professional lives of leaders as many of them aspire to deeply integrate their spirituality with their work. Most would agree that this integration is leading to very positive changes in their relationships and their effectiveness. Further, there is evidence that workplace spirituality programs not only lead to beneficial personal outcomes such as increased positive human health and psychological well-being but that they also deliver improved employee commitment, productivity and reduced absenteeism and turnover. Recent studies have shown that companies perform higher if they emphasize workplace spirituality through both people-centered values and a high-commitment model of attachment between the company and its employees. And, there is mounting evidence that a more humane workplace is not only more productive, but also more flexible and creative and a source of sustainable competitive advantage.

Advocates of workplace spirituality propose that people bring unique and individual spirits to the workplace and are highly motivated by the spiritual need to experience a sense of transcendence and community in their work. Spiritual leadership involves motivating and inspiring workers through a transcendent vision and a culture based in altruistic values to produce a more motivated, committed and productive workforce. In such an organization, where employees' spiritual needs are met and aligned with organizational objectives, this higher motivation, commitment and productivity has a direct impact on organizational processes and outcomes which in turn impacts customer satisfaction and ultimately, organizational performance (see Figure 1).

Workplace Spirituality

Although still in the early stages of theory building and testing, the role of spirituality in the workplace is receiving increasing attention. In particular, workers who view their work as a called vocation are likely to approach their work very differently than employees who see work primarily as a means to pay bills. Most importantly to management and leadership, there is emerging evidence that spirituality provides competitive advantage via its impact on organizational performance. Workplace spirituality incorporates those values that lead to a sense of transcendence and interconnectedness of all life such that workers experience personal fulfillment on the job. This sense of transcendence – of having a calling through one’s work (vocationally) – and the need for membership, community, or social connection provide the foundation for a theory of workplace spirituality. Hence, workplace spirituality must be framed within a holistic or system context of interwoven cultural, organizational, and personal values. Also, to be of benefit to leaders and their organizations, workplace spirituality must demonstrate its utility by impacting performance, turnover, and productivity and other relevant effectiveness and performance criteria.

Finally, to gain a systemic understanding of how workplace spirituality – through transcendence and value congruence among organizational, team, and individual values – impacts organizational effectiveness, a focus on the interconnectedness and interplay across these levels is required. Leaders who seek to transform the organizational culture from materialistic to altruistic values that are more idealistic and spiritual must address value congruence across all levels of the organization.

Religion and Workplace Spirituality

The study of workplace spirituality has, to date, been relatively free of denominational politics and the faith blanket in which such arguments are frequently cloaked. In fact, religious ideology itself has been virtually disregarded. The issues that have surfaced regarding workplace spirituality have avoided any mention of a comparatively right and wrong ideology. Viewing workplace spirituality through the lens of religious traditions and practice can be divisive in that, to the extent that a given religion views itself as the only path to God and salvation, it excludes those who do not share in that particular denominational tradition. Thus, religion can lead to arrogance that a company, faith, or society is “better”, morally superior, or worthier than another. Translating religion of this nature into workplace spirituality can foster zealotry at the expense of organizational goals, offend constituents and customers, and decrease morale and employee well-being.

The Dalai Lama among others makes a distinction between spirituality and religion by noting that religion is concerned with faith in the claims of one faith tradition or another and is connected with systems of belief, ritual prayer, and related formalized practices and ideas. Spirituality, instead, is concerned with qualities of the human spirit including positive psychological concepts such as love and compassion, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, contentment, personal responsibility, and a sense of harmony with one’s environment. Spirituality is found in the pursuit of a vision of service to others; through humility as having the capacity to regard oneself as an individual equal in value to other individuals; through charity, or altruistic love; and through veracity, which goes beyond basic truth-telling to engage one’s capacity for seeing things exactly as they are, freed from subjective distortions.

The common bridge between spirituality and religion is altruistic love – regard or devotion to the interests of others. In this respect, the basic spiritual teachings of the world’s

great religions are remarkably similar. In religion this is manifested through the Golden Rule, also called the Rule of Reciprocity – do unto others as you would have them do unto you – which is common to all major religions. From this perspective, spirituality is necessary for religion but religion is not necessary for spirituality. Consequently, workplace spirituality can be inclusive or exclusive of religious theory and practice.

Spiritual Leadership

Spiritual leadership is a causal theory based on an intrinsic motivation model that incorporates vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love, theories of workplace spirituality, and spiritual survival/spiritual well-being. Spiritual leadership is a model for organization development and transformation that has the potential to guide the evolution of positive organizations where human well-being and organizational-level performance can not only coexist, but can be optimized.

The purpose of spiritual leadership is to tap into the fundamental needs of both the leader and follower for spiritual survival/well-being through calling and membership, to create vision and value congruence across the individual, empowered team, and organization levels and, ultimately, to foster higher levels of organizational commitment and productivity. Operationally, the spiritual leadership process comprises the values, attitudes, and behaviors that are necessary to intrinsically motivate one's self and others so they have a sense of spiritual survival through calling and membership (See Figure 1). This entails:

1. Creating a vision wherein leaders and followers experience a sense of calling in that their life has meaning and makes a difference;
2. Establishing a social/organizational culture based on the values of altruistic love whereby leaders and followers have a sense of membership, feel understood and appreciated, and have genuine care, concern, and appreciation for BOTH self and others.

Spiritual leadership theory also explores the concept of positive human health and psychological well-being through recent developments in workplace spirituality, character ethics, positive psychology and religion. These areas provide a consensus on the values, attitudes, and behaviors necessary for spiritual leadership and ethical and spiritual well-being.

Ethical well-being is defined as authentically living one's values, attitudes, and behavior from the inside-out in creating a principled-center congruent with the universal, consensus values inherent in spiritual leadership theory. Spiritual well-being incorporates transcendence of self in pursuit of a vision/ purpose/mission in service to key stakeholders to satisfy one's need for calling and membership. Individuals who practice spiritual leadership at the personal level have more joy, peace, serenity and overall life satisfaction. Not only will their psychological well-being be greater, but spiritual leaders have better physical health. More specifically, spiritual leaders have a high regard for one's self and others, quality relationships with others, a sense that life is meaningful, the ability to effectively manage their surrounding world, the capacity to follow inner convictions, and a sense of continuing personal growth and self realization.

Workplace Spirituality, Spiritual Leadership and Performance Excellence

The field of performance excellence has established the need to go beyond reporting financial metrics to include nonfinancial predictors of financial performance such as customer satisfaction, organizational outputs such as quality and delivery, process or internal operating measures, and employee commitment and growth (see Figure 1). Moreover, key performance indicators are reported in those areas that have been derived from the firm's strategic plan and for which quantifiable performance objectives have been established. Of these performance categories, employee commitment is the central and leading indicator of the other performance categories; in other words, a high degree of workplace spirituality and spiritual leadership, as a

driver of organizational commitment and productivity, is essential to optimizing organizational performance.

In Figure 1, the strategic management process is shown beginning with the development of a vision and mission, followed by an internal and external analysis, which results in strategic action plans and objectives. These objectives provide the basis for strategy implementation and for determining key performance indicators and outcomes. Further, performance indicators may either be leading or lagging measures. For example, a firm's outputs which include quality (service or product) and on-time delivery are leading indicators of customer satisfaction, which in turn, impact financial performance. Internal processes in an organization, such as best practices, determine whether the outputs are excellent. Internal processes are affected by inputs (e.g., late delivery from a supplier can result in a late delivery to the customer) as well as employee well-being and commitment.

Summary

Developments in strategic scorecards, performance measurement and quality, (e.g., Baldrige Award Criteria and strategy maps) point out the pivotal role that employee well-being and performance plays in predicting all other key strategic performance indicators. The Strategic Model of Performance Excellence through Spiritual Leadership depicted in Figure 1 provides a process for ultimately impacting customer satisfaction and financial performance by fostering the development of the motivation and leadership required to drive both human well-being and excellent operational performance.

Workplace spirituality and spiritual leadership research is in the initial concept/elaboration stage of development. A recent special issue of *The Leadership Quarterly* revealed that research in this area to date has utilized novel methods to develop and test new theory.

Three themes emerged: that what is required for workplace spirituality is an *inner life* that nourishes and is nourished by *calling or transcendence of self* within the context of a *community* based on the values of altruistic love. Satisfying these spiritual needs in the workplace positively influences human health and psychological well-being and forms the foundation for the new spiritual leadership paradigm. By tapping into these basic and essential needs, spiritual leaders produce the follower trust, intrinsic motivation, and commitment that is necessary to simultaneously optimize organizational performance and human well-being. This is the fundamental proposition that should be tested in future research - that spiritual leadership is necessary for the transformation to and continued success of learning organizations – the organizational paradigm viewed as necessary for performance excellence in the 21st century.

Further Readings and References

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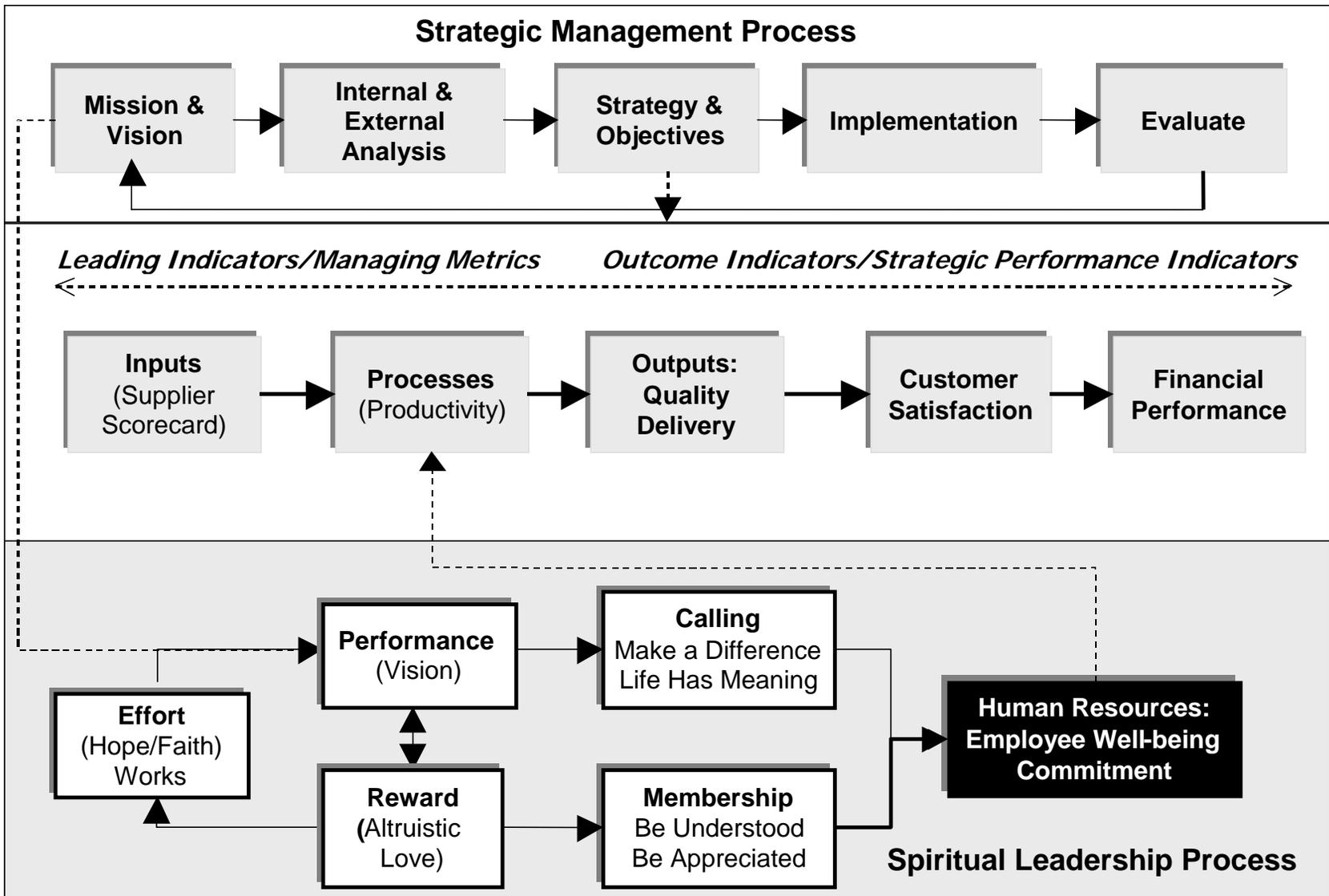


Figure 1. Strategic Model of Performance Excellence Through Spiritual Leadership