Spiritual Leadership as an Integrating Paradigm for
Positive Leadership Development

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Abstract

Integrating positive forms of leadership and positive leadership development with other extant theories of leadership requires a focus on four key issues: 1) achieving consensus on universal values that are necessary (but not sufficient) for positive forms of leadership; 2) the role of positive forms of leadership in achieving value congruence and consistency of values, attitudes, and behavior across the individual, dyad, team, and organizational levels; 3) the personal outcomes or rewards of positive forms leadership; and 4) how positive forms of leadership impact organizational performance. The purpose of this study is to address these key issues by offering spiritual leadership as an integrating paradigm for positive forms of leadership and positive leadership development that leads to the simultaneous optimization of human well-being and sustained performance excellence. Specifically, authentic leadership development (ALD) provides the root construct for positive forms of leadership and the process, i.e., via self awareness, self regulation, positive psychological states and positive moral perspective, whereby leaders and followers achieve the values of altruistic love delineated in spiritual leadership theory.

Keywords: Positive Forms of Leadership, Spiritual Leadership, Positive Leadership Development Leadership, Performance Excellence
INTRODUCTION

The unique stressors facing 21st century organizations to transform themselves from the industrial age centralized, standardized, and formalized bureaucratic paradigm to the flat, flexible, networked, and global learning organizational paradigm requires positive leaders who lead from love rather than fear (Ancona, Kochan, Scully, Van Maanen, & Westney, 1999; Daft, 2005). Several positive forms of leadership have been offered in response to this call for effectively addressing the challenges and expectations of all stakeholders, e.g., customers, owner, employees, suppliers, and the community (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). The most prominent of these include positive psychology, positive organizational behavior, and authentic leadership development.

After World War II, the field of psychology became a science almost exclusively devoted to healing and, in doing so, developed a disease model that focused on pathology while neglecting the idea of a fulfilled individual and a thriving community (Seligman, 2001). However, positive psychology emphasized the notion that psychology is not just the study of pathology, weakness, and damage; it is also the study of strength and virtue. It is not just a branch of medicine concerned with illness or health or fixing what is broken; it is about nurturing what is best in work, education, insight, love, growth, and play (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The purpose of positive psychology is to scientifically investigate and uncover a vision of “the good life” that is empirically sound while being understandable and attractive. Although there is voluminous literature about how people survive and endure under conditions of adversity (Benjamin, 1992; Smith, 1997), little is known of what makes life worth living or about how normal people prevent life from being barren and meaningless and achieve positive human health and well-being. Positive psychology attempts to refocus psychology from a preoccupation with repairing the worst things in life to building positive qualities (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Positive organizational behavior (POB) is defined as “the study and application of positively oriented human resource strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance improvement in today’s workplace (Luthans, 2002, p. 59).” Similar to positive psychology, POB focuses attention on the positive attributes of people that make living worthwhile. POB points managers toward individual’s strengths and emphasizes that positive psychological capital and its states of confidence, hope, optimism and resilience can be cultivated through training and development activities (Gardner & Schermerhorn, 2005).
Avolio and Gardner (2005), drawing from positive psychology, positive organizational behavior, transformational/full-range leadership theory and ethical and moral perspective-taking, present an emerging theory of authentic leadership development (ALD). They discuss the need to develop a “root construct” underlying all forms of positive leadership in order to enrich our understanding of other more specific positive forms of leadership. ALD “involves ongoing processes whereby leaders and followers gain self-awareness and establish open, transparent, trusting and genuine relationships, which in part may be shaped and impacted by planned interventions such as training (Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p. 322).” ALD helps individuals in their search for meaning and connection at work by developing leaders with purpose, values and integrity who genuinely relate to all stakeholders; by fostering greater self-awareness; by restoring and building optimism, confidence and hope; by promoting transparent relationships and decision making that builds trust and commitment among followers; and by nurturing inclusive structures and positive ethical and moral climates.

At the heart of ALD is the premise that this training and development should contribute to the well-being of both leaders and followers and to the attainment of sustainable and veritable performance. Veritable performance “involves non-financial intangibles and tacit knowledge, including human, social and psychological capital, and considering how the organization is fundamentally run . . .” (Avolio and Gardner, 2005, p. 328). The importance of measuring financial and nonfinancial indicators of organizational performance is well articulated in the field of performance measurement and balanced scorecards (Kaplan and Norton, 1992, 2004; Matherly, Fry and Ouimet, 2006).

Avolio and Gardner (2005) identify five components essential for positive forms of leadership:

1. Positive psychological capital – Consists of the positive psychological capacities from POB or confidence, optimism, hope, and resiliency. These positive psychological capacities are open to development and change and can play a crucial role in developing individuals, teams, organizations, and communities.

2. Positive ethics and moral perspective – Draws from positive psychology and positive ethics. Recognizes that it is appropriate to incorporate notions of self-interest into our work in deriving satisfaction from our work behavior. This includes such intrinsically motivating activities as using our skills and creativity, working directly with others for their benefit, and experiencing competence and progress as well as indirectly benefiting society. Cultivating these activities leads to greater awareness of the boundaries of our work relationships as well as a greater ability to actualize our
values and ethical well-being at work (Fry, 2005a). A positive moral perspective is an ethical and transparent decision process whereby leaders draw upon reserves of moral capacity, efficacy, courage, and resiliency and achieve and sustain positive moral actions (May, Chan, Hodges & Avolio, 2003).

3. Positive modeling – Involves “leading by example” as central to a personal and social identification process whereby positive leaders influence and develop their followers to identify and adopt their values. This includes modeling the components essential for positive forms of leadership plus components of authenticity including self-awareness, self-determination and self-regulatory processes.

4. Positive social exchanges – Draws from social exchange theory and the principles of reciprocity and value congruence to explain the processes whereby positive leaders establish effective social exchanges with followers. Leaders that are transparent and unbiased in processing self-relevant information, have personal integrity, and engage in authentic relationships develop leader follower relationships that are characterized by high levels of positive affect and trust, which in turn foster high quality and close relationships, greater value congruence, and follower attitudes and behavior that are consistent with the leader’s values.

5. Positive, strength-based cultures – Provides open access to information, resources, support, and equal opportunity for everyone to learn, grow and develop. Empowers and enables leaders and followers to accomplish their work more effectively. These organizations emphasize the importance of selecting and placing individuals in positions that provide them with daily opportunities to work within their areas of strength emphasize career growth and development through objective assessment of their talents and abilities (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999).

These positive forms of leadership provide the basis for an emerging definition of positive leadership. Inherent in all forms of positive leadership is (1) the development of higher level, universal moral values and character, (2) a focus on helping people in their search for meaning and connection at work and (3) the enhancement of follower well-being and sustained performance excellence. Thus, a logical starting point to define positive leadership is that it encompasses positive/universal ethics and values that enhance employee meaning and connection to maximize both employee well-being and sustained performance excellence.

In this paper, the linkages between positive leadership, positive forms of leadership, positive leadership development and the emerging spiritual leadership paradigm (Fry, 2003, 2005a, 2005b; Fry & Matherly, 2006; Fry, Vitucci, & Cedillo, 2005; Malone & Fry, 2003) are explored. Integrating positive forms of leadership and positive leadership development with other extant theories of leadership requires a focus on four key issues: 1) achieving consensus on universal
values that are necessary (but not sufficient) for positive forms of leadership; 2) the role of positive forms leadership in achieving value congruence and consistency of values, attitudes, and behavior across the individual, group, and organizational levels; 3) the personal outcomes or rewards of positive forms of leadership; and 4) the impact of positive forms of leadership on organizational performance. These key issues are then discussed within the context of spiritual leadership as an integrating paradigm for positive leadership, positive forms of leadership and positive leadership development which, ultimately, lead to the simultaneous optimization of human well-being and sustained performance excellence.

SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

Workplace spirituality and spiritual leadership research is in the initial concept/elaboration stage of development (Hunt, 1999). It is important that theories at this stage meet the four components that provide the necessary and sufficient conditions for the development of any theoretical model. They must specify 1) the units or variables of interest to the researcher, 2) congruence as defined by the laws of relationship among units of the model that specify how they are associated, 3) boundaries within which the laws of relationship are expected to operate, and 4) contingency effects that specify system states within which the units of the theory take on characteristic values that are deterministic and have a persistence through time.

The October, 2005 special issue of The Leadership Quarterly described the research in this area as an emerging paradigm that has utilized novel methods to develop and test new theory. Kuhn (1967, p. 175) defined a paradigm as, “An entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by the members of a given community.” In other words, a paradigm is a philosophical and theoretical framework of a scientific school or discipline within which theories, laws, and generalizations and the methods to test them are formulated. 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 emerging 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 performance excellence and human well-being. A fundamental proposition that should be tested in future research is 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 (Fry, 2005).

Spiritual leadership theory (Fry, 2003, 2005) was built upon Dubin’s model of theory building (Dubin, 1978; Fry & Smith, 1987) and Giacalone and Jurkiewicz’s (2003a, p. 13) definition of workplace spirituality:

A framework of organizational values evidenced in the culture that promotes employees’ experience of transcendence through the work process, facilitating their sense of being connected in a way that provides feelings of compassion and joy.

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. This sense of transcendence – of having a sense of calling through one’s work – and the need for membership or social connection are central to the causal model of spiritual leadership and provide the necessary foundation for any theory of workplace spirituality and spiritual leadership.

Spiritual leadership theory (SLT) is a causal leadership model for organizational transformation designed to create an intrinsically motivated, learning organization. The theory of spiritual leadership was developed within an intrinsic motivation model that incorporates vision, hope/fait, and altruistic love, theories of workplace spirituality, and spiritual survival/well-being. The purpose of spiritual leadership is to tap into the fundamental needs of both 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.

Spiritual leadership comprises the values, attitudes, and behaviors necessary to intrinsically motivate one’s self and others so they have a sense of spiritual survival/well-being through calling and membership. 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; and

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.

To summarize the hypothesized relationships among the variables of the causal model of spiritual leadership (see Figures 1 and 2), “doing what it takes” through faith in a clear, compelling vision produces a sense of calling - that part of spiritual survival that gives one a sense of making a
difference and, therefore, that one’s life has meaning. Vision and hope/faith add belief, conviction, trust, and action for performance of the work to achieve the vision. Thus, spiritual leadership proposes that hope/faith in the organization’s vision keeps followers looking forward to the future and provides the desire and positive expectation that fuels effort through intrinsic motivation.

Insert Figures 1 and 2 about here

Altruistic love is also given from the organization and is received in turn from followers in pursuit of a common vision that drives out and removes fears associated with worry, anger, jealousy, selfishness, failure and guilt and gives one a sense of membership – that part of spiritual survival that gives one an awareness of being understood and appreciated. Thus, this intrinsic motivation cycle based on vision (performance), altruistic love (reward) and hope/faith (effort) results in an increase in one’s sense of spiritual survival (e.g. calling and membership) and ultimately positive organizational outcomes such as increased:

1. Organizational commitment – People with a sense of calling and membership will become attached, loyal to, and want to stay in organizations that have cultures based on the values of altruistic love.
2. Productivity and continuous improvement – People who have hope/faith in the organization’s vision and who experience calling and membership will “Do what it takes” in pursuit of the vision to continuously improve and be more productive.

**Spiritual Leadership and Human Well-Being**

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 (See Table 1). Fry (2005) proposed that spiritual leadership is not only a process that benefits the organization by increasing employee empowerment, commitment and learning. Spiritual leadership is also a source of psychological well-being and positive human health for the individual and is, therefore, a balanced approach that advances the interests of both the company and its employees.

Ethical well-being is defined as the essence of authenticity in 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 (See Table 2). Spiritual well-being incorporates both ethical well-being and 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.

Performance Excellence Through Spiritual Leadership

The Strategic Model of Performance Excellence through Spiritual Leadership depicted in Figure 3 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 sustained performance excellence. Drawing from the quality management, Baldrige Program and balanced scorecard perspectives, this model provides a framework for linking leading and lagging indicators to the strategic management process in order to develop a strategic scorecard (Matherly and Fry, 2005; Matherly, Fry, & Ouimet, In Press).

In Figure 3, 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. Generally, the more strategic the level of the scorecard in the organizational chart, the more results oriented and lagging are the specific measures that are reported in the scorecard.

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 play in predicting all other key strategic performance indicators. Both Kaplan and Norton (1992) and Baldrige (Mahoney & Thor, 1994) recognize the essential and pivotal role that employees play in the achievement of quality and internal, operational results that then impact customer satisfaction and financial results. Kaplan and Norton (1996) assert that the learning and growth perspective is the driver for achieving performance outcomes in the other categories. Likewise, the Baldrige Award Criteria (2004) recognize that the knowledge, skills, creativity and motivation of all employees is central to an organization’s success; therefore, valuing and genuinely caring for employees’ development, learning and well-being will result in higher organizational commitment, productivity and quality. According to Baldrige, organizational and personal learning will lead to a more flexible, responsive and efficient organization, which will result in a sustainable distinctive competency and market advantage.

The concepts of a positively oriented strength based culture (organizational context) and veritable performance in authentic leadership development (Avolio and Gardner, 2005) are similarly addressed in the strategic management and quality literature and specifically, in the topics of performance measurement and the balanced scorecard (Kaplan and Norton, 1992, Mahoney and Thor, 1994, Matherly & Fry, 2005; Matherly, Fry, and Ouimet, In Press). The importance of creating an organizational culture where leaders and followers can continually learn and grow, i.e., a positively oriented strength based culture, (Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May and Walumba, 2005; and Luthans and Avolio, 2003) is analogous to the learning and growth perspective described in the balanced scorecard (Kaplan and Norton, 1992, 2004). Three principal categories, that demonstrate a firm’s commitment to investing in the capability of their employees, systems and organizational processes, are included in the learning and growth perspective: 1. employee capabilities, 2. information system capabilities and 3. motivation, empowerment, and alignment. Essentially, organizations need to develop the capabilities of people, systems and procedures that will be required to achieve sustained performance improvements to meet the competitive challenges of global markets.
Avolio and Gardner (2005) define veritable performance as multidimensional to include financial as well as nonfinancial elements of organizational performance, e.g., the development of human, social and psychological capital such as knowledge and organizational processes. The field of performance excellence and strategic performance measurement, e.g., the balanced scorecard, 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 (Baldrige Award, 2004; Kaplan and Norton, 1992, 1996, 2004b). In summary, 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 sustained performance excellence.

**Spiritual Leadership as an Integrating Paradigm for Positive Leadership Development**

Positive leadership is defined as leadership that (1) develops higher level, universal moral values and character, (2) enhances employee meaning and connection and (3) maximizes both employee well-being and sustained performance excellence. Given this definition, positive leadership and positive leadership development can be identified as components of SLT and also considered central to spiritual leadership development. While SLT explicitly prescribes universal values based in altruistic love as essential for effective spiritual leadership, positive forms of leadership prescribe the process whereby leaders and followers develop these universal values. In other words, implementing the five positive forms of leadership (see Figure 4), is the essence of positive leadership development within SLT.

Referencing Table 1 and Figure 4, the positive psychological capacities (confidence, optimism, hope and resiliency) underlying the positive psychological capital positive form of leadership are derived from positive psychology and are also considered to key to the universal consensus values proposed in SLT. SLT also incorporates the constructs of meaning and connection (membership) as outcomes of spiritual leadership (Fry, 2005a). Moreover, SLT is a theory explicitly designed to maximize both employee well-being and performance excellence (Matherly & Fry, 2005; Matherly, Fry & Ouimet, In Press).

The positive ethics and moral perspective positive form of leadership helps to further define how one moves from self-based to other-based values, attitudes, and behaviors - the essence of
ethical well-being and authenticity (Fry, 2005). The positive modeling and positive social exchanges positive forms leadership define the key processes whereby both leaders and followers may positively develop themselves and their relationship within the intrinsic motivation model of SLT. Finally, a positive, strengths-based culture is needed to provide the organizational-level context necessary to nurture the application and practice of positive forms of leadership to further increase the effectiveness of the spiritual leadership process at all levels.

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Fry (2003) argued that SLT is not only inclusive of major extant theories of leadership (e.g., transformational, charismatic, servant, authentic, path-goal), but that it is also more conceptually and empirically distinct, parsimonious, and less confounded (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Lee, 2003a, 2003b; Fry et al., 2005). Several key issues have been addressed. First, the universal values of SLT are necessary for positive forms of leadership and leadership development. Second, positive forms of leadership prescribe the process whereby leaders and followers develop these universal values. Third, human well being is the major outcome of positive forms of leadership. Fourth, implementing the five positive forms of leadership drives the development of the values of altruistic love in both leaders and followers (See Figure 4), which in turn (and with effort and vision) impact calling and membership which positively influences employee well-being, commitment and productivity (See Figure 3). These, in turn, ultimately, result in excellent organization processes, quality outputs, customer satisfaction and financial performance.

Two models to date - legacy leadership and the twelve step recovery process - while not directly using the terminology of positive leadership, have been proposed that as applications of positive leadership development within SLT. Fry and Whittington (2005) extended authentic leadership theory by offering legacy leadership as a more specific model within the context of SLT. Legacy leadership can also be applied as a model for implementing positive forms of leadership in dyads. The legacy leadership approach to authentic leadership explicitly identifies leader motives and argues for a need to investigate the motives — particularly the power orientation — of leaders. Furthermore, future research should examine the degree to which a leader’s espoused values are consistent with the universal consensus values of altruistic love that are critical for authentic and other positive forms of leadership.

Fry, Matherly, and Vitucci (In Press) draw from the emerging spiritual leadership paradigm to integrate the dispersed theory and research on workaholism. They first review theories of
extrinsic and intrinsic motivation and argue that enthusiastic workaholism is rooted in intrinsic motivation and positively related to personal and organizational outcomes while nonenthusiastic workaholism is based on extrinsic motivation and negatively related to personal and organizational outcomes. Next, SLT is reviewed and used to explain these differences in positive human health and psychological well-being for enthusiastic and nonenthusiastic workaholics. Then, drawing on the recovery literature, they propose that workaholism is actually a continuum that can result in various degrees or levels of positive human health, psychological and spiritual well-being. Last, they discuss implications for future research and human resource practices relevant for adapting the twelve step recovery process for the recovery and development of nonenthusiastic workaholics and the organizations which nurture them.

Finally, a key area for future research is the impact of spiritual practices and workplace spirituality and, in particular, an inner life practice on positive forms leadership and positive leadership development, e.g., spending time in nature, prayer, meditation, reading inspirational literature, yoga, observing religious traditions, and writing in a journal. This is a major theme that emerged from the October, 2005 *The Leadership Quarterly* special issue on spiritual leadership that has received little attention to date.
REFERENCES


Table 1. Comparison of scholarly fields emphasizing values relating to ethical and spiritual well-being

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Table 2 Universal Values of Spiritual Leadership

1. TRUST/LOYALITY - In my chosen relationships, I am faithful and have faith in and rely on the character, ability, strength and truth of others.

2. FORGIVENESS/ACCEPTANCE/GRATITUDE – I suffer not the burden of failed expectations, gossip, jealousy, hatred, or revenge. Instead, I choose the power of forgiveness through acceptance and gratitude. This frees me from the evils of self-will, judging others, resentment, self-pity, and anger and gives me serenity, joy and peace.

3. INTEGRITY – I walk the walk as well as talk the talk. I say what I do and do what I say.

4. HONESTY – I seek truth and rejoice in it and base my actions on it.

5. COURAGE – I have the firmness of mind and will, as well as the mental and moral strength, to maintain my morale and prevail in the face of extreme difficulty, opposition, threat, danger, hardship, and fear.

6. HUMILITY – I am modest, courteous, and without false pride. I am not jealous, rude or arrogant. I do not brag.

7. KINDNESS – I am warm-hearted, considerate, humane and sympathetic to the feelings and needs of others.

8. EMPATHY/COMPASSION - I read and understand the feelings of others. When others are suffering, I understand and want to do something about it.

9. PATIENCE/MEEKNESS/ENDURANCE - I bear trials and/or pain calmly and without complaint. I persist in or remain constant to any purpose, idea, or task in the face of obstacles or discouragement. I pursue steadily any project or course I begin. I never quit in spite of counter influences, opposition, discouragement, suffering or misfortune.

10. EXCELLENCE - I do my best and recognize, rejoice in, and celebrate the noble efforts of my fellows.

11. FUN - Enjoyment, playfulness, and activity must exist in order to stimulate minds and bring happiness to one’s place of work. I therefore view my daily activities and work as not to be dreaded yet, instead, as reasons for smiling and having a terrific day in serving others.
Figure 1. Causal model of spiritual leadership
Figure 2. Expanded causal model of spiritual leadership
Figure 3. Strategic Model of Performance Excellence through Spiritual Leadership
Figure 4. Model of How Positive Forms of Leadership Result in the Development of the Values, Attitudes and Behaviors of Spiritual Leadership in Leaders and Followers