REVIEW OF RESEARCH

HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY TRENDS IN SPIRITUALITY AND LEADERSHIP

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A good society relies on the education of its citizenry. Following the 1983 publication of A Nation at Risk (National Commission on Excellence in Education), America turned a skeptical eye toward its educational institutions. Specifically targeting the leadership of its schools, our country called for a closer examination of the characteristics of school administrators and what factors predicted an effective school. Influenced by the parallel findings in business and organizational management, the habits, beliefs, practices, personalities, and styles of leaders were closely assessed for their ability to instill a sense of community and good will in their respective organization. Toward the end of the 20th century, social scientists suggested that effective leadership was more than profit margins, effective offices, and power. Revealing a persuasive nexus between leadership and spirituality, theorists such as Parker J. Palmer and others set the stage for a new standard by which leaders would be judged. The morality and integrity of leaders became more important than ever.

    This essay will explore the concept of spirituality and its influence in leadership throughout history. Although this dimension has been overlooked until recently, it is a critical component to a leader's effectiveness, particularly in education.

A NATION AT RISK IN EDUCATION

Following the 1983 landmark publication, *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education), the significant and pervasive problems in America's public education system came to the forefront. This study revealed a widespread deterioration in the scholastic aptitude of its students as well as in the morale of teachers. Plagued by antiquated physical plants and outdated technology, and decimated by school violence, public schools were regarded as unsafe and outdated. The sense of hopelessness and powerlessness of teachers added to a strained relationship between school administrators and parents. A movement to establish a research-oriented approach to identify the

determinants of effective schools followed. Texts such as Barth's *Improving Schools from Within* (with L. S. Guest, 1990), Fullan's *The New Meaning of Educational Change* (with S. Stiegelbauer, 1987) and Sergiovanni's (1994, 1995, 1996) prolific serial texts and articles and others set new standards for school organization and effective leadership. Parallel examinations in the business and institutional management reinforced the finding that persons in the top positions of organizations were in need of significant transformation (Bennis, 1989; Deming, 1986; Greenleaf, 1977; Gronn, 1997).

THE SPIRITUAL ROOTS IN LEADERSHIP THROUGHOUT HISTORY

Leadership effectiveness has historically received considerable attention. Why people follow certain leaders, how individuals reach positions of power, and what qualities are vital to a leader's effectiveness are central to these inquiries. In the book, *Certain Trumpets* (1994), Wills compared and contrasted the world's greatest and most tragic leaders throughout history. Examining the multiple facets of some of our most recognized figures in politics, reform, business, philosophy, art and the military, Wills sifted through the belief systems, actions, and personalities of over 30 leaders. Out of this analysis emerges the impression of the special, esoteric nature of these men and women. Transcending formal training and sometimes the popular vote, effective leaders appear to have a remarkably recognizable, yet difficult-to-measure, set of characteristics that distinguishes them from their less than successful colleagues.

The concept of spirituality has been indirectly, if not directly, related to persons of power and leadership. Indeed, the concept of spirituality can be traced to the earliest of civilizations and the organization of the first communities. Western philosophy might hold Jesus as one of the most significant, early, spiritual leaders. Because of his place in the establishment of Christianity, Jesus has personified, and symbolically connected religion and spirituality (Adler, 1905; Byron, 1998; Wakefield, 1983). Contemporary studies of leadership frequently allude to a spiritual connection between leaders and their followers. Although there are compelling arguments for the existence of a spiritual dimension in all humans, if not all effective leaders, there have been limited empirical studies that seek to demonstrate this point. Following common research practices in the social sciences, qualitative investigations have begun to support intangible concepts, such as spirituality, which are believed to be real, but difficult to prove.

Many theorists have recently addressed this issue. In the book, *The Gracious Mystery* (1987), Bacik examined the elusiveness of spirituality as "a mystery…that which eludes control, explanation, and logical calculation" (p. 2). Bacik likened spirituality to a three-dimensional quality in our one-dimen-

sional world. Yet, to Bacik, spirituality "is the vitality at the center of human existence" (p. 13). In a similar treatise, Daniel Helminiak's *The Human Core of Spirituality* (1996), traces the connectedness of religion and spiritualness, and refers to two of the earliest philosophers, Plato and Aristotle. Helminiak traced their historical quest as they attempted to relate not only religious beliefs, but the mind and the soul. According to Helminiak, modern society has become overly reliant upon scientific and technological insights. Challenging us to realize that we must synchronize spirituality with the laws of physics, medicine, and biology, Helminiak felt that spirituality is not necessarily dependent upon religious practices. Helminiak conceded that the two have been traditionally linked, probably due to their esoteric nature and their connection with an intrinsic belief system that is fundamental to all humans, all of philosophy, and of science. Regardless of the content, Helminiak notes, "spirituality [should] relate to the deepest meaning of humanity" (p. 5). How one feels about spirituality is contingent upon "how [one answers the] question: what is a human being?" (p. 5). Finally, Helminiak offers, spirituality is an authentic self-transcendence of actions which are directed toward truth and goodness. Spiritual persons follow an essence of inner self guidance, a conscience, a drive from the deepest self. True self identity is a spiritual reality. Accordingly, spirituality is faith, regardless of one's religious orientation, it is faith in humanity, it is present in all persons.

   Although obvious in many religious leaders, modern theorists now contend that spirituality is inherent in the everyman, regardless of social, political, or religious beliefs (Adler, 1905; Bacik, 1987; Helminiak, 1996; Underhill, 1993). Spiritual persons have been characterized as wise, truthful, honest, and moral. Spiritually influenced persons allow triumph of good over evil. Spiritual persons act with conviction and courage in the face of adversity. When attempting to trace this quality, it appears that the core of one's spirituality seems to come from within, transcending formal, covert teaching and appearing as an intuitive personal quality (Adler, 1905; Berdyaev, 1953; Covey, 1970; Helminiak, 1996; Spears, 1994).

THE LEADERSHIP CRISIS IN AMERICA

In accordance with the changes in the social-political climate of the mid-20th century, the American public turned a judgmental eye on its large institutions as well as its leaders spurring a widespread analysis of leadership effectiveness (Batten, 1968; Brown, Farr, & Hoffmann 1997; Covey, 1970, 1989; T. Moore, 1992; Palmer, 1987; Roskind, 1992; Sullivan & Brown, 1997). Drawing from some of the tenets found in ancient philosophy, these theorists found that many of the time-honored values that were fundamental to the establishment of successful communities, cultures, and societies through history, were now absent in the persons of contemporary leaders. Fairholm (1997), Greenleaf (1977),

Hawley (1993), and Palmer (1991, 1998) were some of the prominent theorists to suggest that these qualities were necessary to the effective management of our institutions and organizations.

Stephen Covey, one of the first who analyzed America's managerial problems, also made a valuable connection between leadership and spirituality. In *Spiritual Roots of Human Relations* (1970), Covey defined an institution as being a "shadow of its leader…a leader's character, attitude, example and practice diffuse themselves down through the entire organization, and leave an indelible impression upon every person, every practice, every process" (p. 260). Covey further likened good leaders to shepherds, individuals who all-knowing, lead the innocent away from oppression. In a validation of a spiritual-religious connection, Covey advised that "to become a shepherd [leader] follow the true Shepherd" (p. 267), reinforcing a relationship between spirituality, the characteristics of Jesus, and leadership. The embodiment of these in a single individual would foster a concern for humanity as well as the collective good of a given community. In a departure from the prevailing ideology of the 1950s and 1960s, Covey characterized all managerial and organizational problems as ultimately not technical, financial, or academic, but spiritual in nature. Covey and his colleagues postulated that effective leadership was not so much a matter of learned techniques and practices, or adherence to rules and regulations. It was more than financial competency and profit margins. Covey asserted that individuals who followed an internally-driven compass, abiding by a code of morality, ethics, and integrity that supported and promoted good will toward all individuals were the truly effective and spiritual leaders. These leaders were icons of trust, honesty, and inspiration. They were driven to assure the empowerment of all persons in an organization.

Bolman and Deal (1995) used a parable to define the concept of spirituality when they wrote *Leading with Soul.* Bridging the notion of soulfulness of spirituality with modern leadership theory, these authors creatively followed one common man's journey into self-reflection and generalized it for all persons. Citing a deep sense of moral loneliness and moral illiteracy in the current state of American affairs, Bolman and Deal contended that we have lost our "deep understanding of the spirit, purpose and meaning of the human experience" (p. 8). These authors theorized that a lack of proper [spiritual] leadership had contributed to the current demise of society. Bolman and Deal moved their readers to revive a sense of ethics, morality, and spirituality into the workplace.

> Perhaps we lost our way when we forgot that the heart of leadership lies in the hearts of leaders We fooled ourselves, thinking that sheer bravado or sophisticated analytic techniques could respond to our deepest concern. We lost touch with a most precious human gift — our spirit. (p. 6)

In their quest for a new definition of effective leadership, the authors dis-

pelled two previously dominant images of leaders:

> one of the heroic champion with extraordinary stature and vision, the other …[a] skilled analyst who solves pressing problems with information, programs, and policies…Both images miss the essence of leadership…, neglecting deeper and more enduring elements of courage, spirit, and hope. (Bolman & Deal, 1995, p. 5)

Although once regarded as intangible, esoteric, mystical, and ensconced in religious practices, theorists of the latter part of the 20th century began to attempt to suggest the influence of spirituality in leadership (Duquoc, 1970; Helminiak, 1996; C. Moore, 1988; Nouwen, 1975; Wakefield, 1983). Palmer (1987) and Sullivan and Brown (1997) were some of the first to recognize spirituality and to define it in a way that it affected others, especially in the way leaders influenced followers. According to Sullivan and Brown, spiritual persons create a sense of hope, harmony, joy, faith, and feelings of belonging in those around them, qualities particularly important to leaders.

Who could be considered the most influential theorist to bridge spirit with the physical sciences? Teilhard de Chardin's *Phenomenon of Man*, suggested that we are, today, an accumulation of spiritual matter, an essence which has transcended from generation to generation; and that, over time, despite our individual mortality, our spirits evolve onward, re-creating our history within our modern existence (King, 1999). His extensive work stands as one of the most persuasive attempts to bridge science with spirituality. If Teilhard is correct, there may be a spiritualness in all of us. In King's translation, four convictions predominate:
  (1) that the universe is an evolution;
  (2) that evolution proceeds toward spirit;
  (3) that the spirit is fully realized in a form of personality;
  (4) that the supremely personal is the universal Christ (p. 21).

McMahon (1994) echoed Teilhard's philosophy in the book, *Discovering the Spirit*, but underscored the importance of free will. Taking leadership beyond popularity and power, McMahon suggested that spiritual leaders operate out of concern for followers. In addition to the traits of intuitiveness, self-reflection, coverage, and creativity, spiritual leaders are individuals who free people. In the context of an organization led by a spiritual leader, one would not find persons who feel oppressed, powerless, trapped, divided, or lost. Other theorists began to define spirituality in terms of personal characteristics: fair, emotionally wise, imaginative, enthusiastic, alert, charming, honest, humble, courageous, generous (Blanchard & Peale, 1988; Byron, 1998; Fairholm, 1998; Hawley, 1993). In *Capturing the Heart of Leadership* (1997), Fairholm reinforced the belief that truly effective leaders are intrinsically driven by a set of qualities and beliefs that are spiritual in nature. Fairholm described a spiri-

tual person as one who exhibits behavior consistent with his conscience and a spiritual leader as one who uses integrity to fulfill his mission without hurting others, enhancing the personal liberties of his followers. In *Reawakening the Spirit at Work* (1993), Hawley argued convincingly of the necessity in having spirituality in the workplace.

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