

## Spiritual Leadership Ethical Values and its Effectiveness: A Theoretical Perspective

*REJITHA. S<sup>1</sup> and Dr. AJOY MATHEW<sup>2</sup>*

*<sup>1, 2</sup>Bharathiar School of Management and Entrepreneur Development, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India.*

E-Mail ID: [rejithalochan@gmail.com](mailto:rejithalochan@gmail.com), Ph.no:9585580165.

E-Mail ID: [ajoymathew@yahoo.com](mailto:ajoymathew@yahoo.com), Ph.no:9843070778

### **Abstract:**

*Values that have long been considered spiritual ideals, such as integrity, honesty, and humility, have been demonstrated to have an effect on leadership success. The practices are traditionally associated with spirituality as demonstrated in daily life have also been shown to be connected to leadership effectiveness and have been emphasized in many spiritual teachings. It has also been found to be crucial leadership skills: showing respect for others, demonstrating fair treatment, expressing caring and concern, listening responsively, recognizing the contributions of others, and engaging in reflective practice.*

**Keywords:***Values, Leadership success, Spiritual teachings, leadership skills, effectiveness and reflective practice.*

### **Introduction:**

Spirituality in the workplace can exist without proselytizing or pressuring individuals. However, in the case of effective leadership, we shall find that spirituality expresses itself not so much in words or preaching, but in the embodiment of spiritual values such as integrity, and in the demonstration of spiritual behavior such as expressing caring and concern. Giacalone & Jurkiewicz (2004) define workplace spirituality as 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. Many leadership theories emphasize the need for the leader to articulate an inspiring vision, but what is important is not so much words but rather actions: the level of ethics demonstrated, the respect and compassion shown to others. This meta-analysis of leadership research extracts the spiritual qualities and practices that have been studied in relationship to measures of leadership success. Many experts expect strategy, intelligence, even ruthlessness to be marks of a successful leader, but a review of the literature shows that these are not the defining elements. Instead, spiritual values such as integrity, honesty, and humility have been repeatedly found to be key elements of leadership success. Personal integrity, for example, has been shown to be the most important element for engendering follower respect and trust. Spiritual teachings also urge the practice of treating others with love and compassion: showing respect, demonstrating fairness, expressing caring, listening attentively, and appreciating others gifts and contributions. Spirituality gives us one way of looking at leadership, a way that can integrate character, behavior, effect on followers, and achievement of group goals. Leadership research yields a wealth of evidence for the importance of spiritual values as embodied in the leader's character.

### **Review of literature:**

Early theories Leadership studies began early in the twentieth century by examining traits, or personal qualities of leaders. A couple of problems with this approach were that there was little agreement about universal traits (**Bird, 1940; House & Aditya, 1997**), and that the lists of traits gave little insight about what an effective leader actually does. The next logical step was to examine leader behavior to find out which practices were most effective. In general, the researchers concluded that a focus on people rather than production brought higher work-unit productivity, whereas over-emphasis on direction at the expense of relationships damaged worker satisfaction and loyalty (**Champoux, 2000**) Transformational and charismatic leadership theories theorists have also turned to the examination of follower motivation. Transformational and charismatic leadership theories focus upon how a leader engages the minds and emotions of followers.

According to **Bass (1985, 1998)**, transformational leadership is composed of charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These components are contrasted with transactional leadership, which emphasizes contingent reward or discipline. Charismatic leadership theories focus upon the element of charisma and its effect upon follower self-concepts (**Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993**), follower perceptions of the leader's extraordinary identity or follower's higher-order needs. Some of these studies equate transformational and charismatic theories, but there are important differences. Several researchers have shown that an overemphasis on the leader's charisma is unhealthy for both individuals and organizations. When followers focus upon the identity and extraordinary qualities of the leader instead of upon their own development as individuals, they can become passive and dependent. Several studies have found that followers of charismatic leaders tend to be immature, indecisive individuals with low self-esteem (**Yukl, 1999**).

**Howell (1988)** found that charismatic leadership does not tend to evolve in individualistic cultures. In the spiritual arena, charismatic leadership has been found to be associated with cults, and some researchers have expressed concern about this type of leadership being used to develop corporate cultism (**Tourish & Pinnington, 2002**). Because this type of charismatic leadership requires dependent followers, researchers have noted that it is most effective in times of change or crisis, when followers feel most confused or needy (**Northouse, 2001**), and its success is therefore often situation-dependent. This type of charismatic leadership is also difficult to sustain because so much depends upon the magnetic personality of the leader, so there are problems with succession and institutionalization of the culture that the leader initiates (**Conger & Kanungo, 1998; Yukl, 1999**). However, charisma is only one element of the larger theory of transformational leadership, and definitions vary widely (**Yukl, 1999**). Studies have shown that it is the element most closely correlated with effectiveness (**Bass, 1998, p.5**), but this does not mean that personal magnetism has been isolated as the most important dimension of effective leadership. Instead, charisma has been described as encompassing a wide range of ideas such as respect, trust, and admiration for the leader's ethics, as well as the leader's extraordinary capabilities (**Bass, 1998, p. 5**). It has also been described as encompassing the leader's vision and

a sense of mission that is effectively articulated(Lowe, Kroeck, &Sivasubramaniam, 1996, p. 388).

### **Spiritual leadership theory:**

Fry (2003) defines spiritual leadership as the values, attitudes, and behaviors necessary to intrinsically motivate one's self and others so that they have a sense of spiritual survival through calling and membership. Spiritual leadership is also demonstrated through behavior, whether in individual reflective practice or in the ethical, compassionate, and respectful treatment of others. Spiritual individuals are perhaps more likely to demonstrate spiritual leadership, but a person does not have to be spiritual or religious to provide spiritual leadership. In addition, it encompasses the individual's relationship to the self and/or a Higher Power or God as demonstrated in personal reflective practice. Fry's description of the more collective dimension of membership involves establishing a social/ organizational culture based on altruistic love whereby leaders and followers have genuine care, concern, and appreciation for both self and others, thereby producing a sense of membership and [feeling]understood and appreciated. Similarly, the interpretation of the collective dimension of spiritual leadership in this paper relates to how the leader treats others, manifesting his or her inner convictions in outer behavior.

### **Spiritual values and leadership success:**

Integrity as the most crucial spiritual value for leader success. In describing the origin of transformational leadership, Bass (1998) similarly states that the transformational leader's commitment derives from the leader's own conscience and internalized values. Hendricks &Hendricks (2003) base their leadership theory on thirty years ofresearch involving thousands ofsubjects, and their entire theory begins with integrity, with their conclusion being that when people operate from integrity, personal and professional well-being accelerates tremendously. Leadership based on strategy and image management can be hollow. In this case, according to Conger (1999), leaders become so involved in crafting images of themselves that their own personal identity and convictions may be lost. If the approval of followers is the goal, the inner moral compass is undermined.

### **Integrity and ethical influence :**

The leader's integrity affects followers not only by influencing worker motivation and satisfaction, but also by creating ethical influence. Morgan (1993) notes that four separate workplace surveys found immediate supervisors to be the primary influence on the ethical behavior of workers, with peers as only a secondary influence (p. 200). Leader integrity has been found to clearly affect the ethical climate in an organization, influencing the ethical choices that workers make. For example, Lewicki, Dineen, & Tomlinson (2001) found that the ethical behavior of supervisors either positively or negatively affected the ethical climate for workers. Similarly, Robertson & Anderson (1993) found that leaders create a climate that influences the ethical decisions of followers. Spiritual values and behavior emphasize the need to show respect for others and for the environment as fellow creations of a Higher Power.

#### **Humility as related to leadership success :**

Another indicator of spiritual values in a leader is the presence of humility. Most spiritual paths emphasize the need for humility because personal vanity can set up the self as more important than other human beings or God. In empirical research, humility has also been found to be connected to leadership effectiveness. One way to test humility is to compare self ratings with ratings by others. Using this method, Atwater, Roush, & Fischthal (1995) and Van Velsor, Taylor, & Leslie (1993) found that the leaders who rated themselves lowest were rated highest by their followers (Fleenor, McCauley, & Brutus, 1996). Also, managers who overrated themselves were perceived by followers to be less effective (Van Velsor et al., 1993).

#### **Humility versus charisma :**

In spite of all the fascination with charismatic personalities, it turns out that quiet, humble leaders who stay in the background are often the most effective (Badaracco, 2001). Sorcher & Brant (2002) have actually found that in fact, a high degree of personal humility is far more evident among exceptional leaders than is raw ambition (p. 8). Similarly, Yukl (1999) summarizes the findings of four descriptive studies of transformational leaders by concluding that these leaders are usually not considered to be charismatic by the members of their organization. Collins describes how he saw the modesty of these leaders demonstrated in interviews in which they would describe the company and the contributions of other executives

at length, but they would instinctively deflect discussion about their own role. Once again, effective leadership and the spiritual value of humility find a common ground. Wagner-Marsh & Conley (1999) describe the basic attitude that is key to both successful transformation of an organization and development of a spiritually based firm as agenuine sense of humility.

### **Spiritual practices related to leader effectiveness:**

Demonstrating respect for others' values Followers look first to the leader's character, but studies have also found that the specific behaviors emphasized by many spiritual paths are clearly related to leadership effectiveness. A review of the relationship between humility and effective leadership leads naturally to one of the most important spiritual practices which demonstrates respect for others. Fry (2003) defines altruistic love as a sense of wholeness, harmony and well-being produced through care, concern, and appreciation of both self and others. Many leaders have been successful in communicating their vision and motivating followers to subscribe, much to the detriment of the organization. Shamir et al. (1993) proposed a model in which the leader linked the organizational goals to the followers self-concepts and values, creating value congruence between the follower, the leader, and the organization.

### **Expressing caring and concern:**

Expressing support and concern for others is a practice emphasized by virtually all spiritual paths.

According to much empirical research, this practice is also crucial to leadership success. A leader's ability to be caring and considerate towards others has been shown to be a key determinant of leader success or failure. Relationships with subordinates in particular were considered the most pervasive interpersonal factor distinguishing successful from unsuccessful executives in one study (Deal, Sessa, & Taylor, 1996). A leader's demonstration of caring and concern can go beyond the walls of the organization to make a commitment to the community as well. A leader's promotion of corporate philanthropy has been shown to have strong effects on employee perceptions of fairness, work environment, and organizational ethics, all of which have been shown to have effects on motivation and commitment.

### **Appreciating the contributions of others:**

One study of outstanding global leaders discovered that they experience a silent, expanded, restfully alert, and non-attached state of consciousness, which forms the basis of higher states of consciousness, much more frequently than comparison groups (Haring, Heaton, & Alexander, 1995). Reflective practice is one means by which many leaders are able to gain understanding and to discover this sense of transcendent meaning. Reflective practice also improves mental and physical resiliency in response to the stress which typically comes from leadership positions. Meditation has also been shown to reduce blood lactate levels (a biochemical marker for stress and anxiety) and blood pressure levels (Anderson et al., 1999). Leaders who promote reflective practice for both themselves and others thus bring increased productivity as well as cost savings for their organizations. Reflective practice has thus been proven to enhance physical and emotional resiliency, as well as maturity and goodwill, all requirements for successful leadership.

### **Findings:**

The field of research into spirituality in the workplace is just beginning to emerge, so much of the knowledge that has been gained has been scattered in different streams located in the fields of business, psychology, communication, human resources, religious studies, and medicine. The spiritual values of integrity, honesty, and humility, and the spiritual practices of treating others with respect and fairness, expressing caring and concern, listening responsively, appreciating others, and taking time for personal reflection have all been linked to quantifiable positive effects for organizations and individuals. They cause leaders to be judged as more effective by both their peers and their subordinates, and they lead to enhanced performance. Contrary to popular opinion, there is not a contradiction between the values and practices endorsed for spiritual success and those required for leadership success. Instead, research shows that there is a clear consistency between the ideals in both arenas.

### **Conclusion:**

Examining the relationship between spirituality and leadership can give us valuable insight into leader motivation as well as follower perceptions, motivation, retention, ethics, and performance. In many studies, a leader's demonstration of spiritual values such as integrity, honesty, and

humility have been found to be clearly related to leadership success. These qualities have been selected because they are prominent in leadership research, but this list is by no means exhaustive. The conclusions of many researchers on the importance of integrity for leadership success should be applied to the practices of screening, hiring, developing, and evaluating leaders. It is ironic that prospective employees are tested on their intelligence and analytical abilities in case-based interviewing processes, for example, especially when the candidate's talents have already been clearly demonstrated in coursework. On the other hand, integrity and ethical values are assumed as a given, for both prospective and current employees. Candidates should be tested with ethics cases, not just strategy cases or questions. For current employees, anonymous surveys could be used so that subordinates could rate the integrity and various ethical practices of their supervisors.

## References:

- [1].Alexander, C. N., Rainforth, M. V., & Gelderloos, P. (1991). Transcendental meditation, self actualization, and psychological health: A conceptual overview and statistical meta-analysis.
- [2].Journal of Behavior & Personality, 6(5), 189–248. Alexander, C. N., Swanson, G. C., Rainforth, M. V., & Carlisle, T. W. (1993). Effects of the Transcendental Meditation program on stress reduction, health, and employee development: A prospective study in two occupational settings. *Anxiety, Stress, and Coping: An International Journal*, 6, 245–262.
- [3].Anderson, V. L., Levinson, E. M., Barker, W., & Kiewra, K. R. (1999). The effects of meditation on teacher-perceived occupational stress, state and trait anxiety, and burnout. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 14(1), 3–18.
- [4].Antonovsky, A. (1987). *Unraveling the mystery of health*. San Francisco Jossey-Bass.
- Atwater, L., Roush, P., & Fischthal, A. (1995). The influence of upward feedback on self-and follower ratings of leadership. *Personnel Psychology*, 48, 35–59.
- [5].Badaracco Jr., J. L. (2001, September) *Harvard Business Review*, 79(8), 120–126.



- [6].Barrett, R. (2003). Culture and consciousness: Measuring spirituality in the workplace by mapping values. In R. A. Giacalone, & C. L. Jurkiewicz (Eds.), *Handbook of workplace spirituality and organizational performance* (pp. 345–366). New York: M.E. Sharpe.
- [7].Bass, B. M. (1985). *Leadership and performance beyond expectation*. New York: Free Press.
- Bass, B. M. (1990). *Bass and Stogdill's handbook of leadership: Theory, research, and managerial applications* (3rd ed.). New York: Free Press.
- [8].Bass, B. M. (1998). *Transformational leadership: Industrial, military, and educational impact*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates 49–80). New York: Academic Press.
- Bass, B. M., & Steidlmeir, P. (1999). Ethics, character, and authentic transformational leadership behavior. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 10(2), 182–217.
- Bates, S. (2002, March). Honesty, empathy cited in effective leadership. *HR Magazine*, 47(3).
- [9].Beauchamp-Turner, D. L., & Levinson, D. M. (1992). Effects of meditation on stress, health, and affect. *Medical Psychotherapy*, 5, 123–132.
- [10].Bechler, C., & Johnson, S. D. (1995). Leadership and listening: A study of member perceptions. *Small Group Research*, 26, 77–85.
- [11].Becker, T. (2000). Hallmarks and consequences of integrity in organizations: The employees' perspective. Paper presented at the Academy of Management Conference, Toronto, Ontario, August.
- [12].Bennis, W., & O'Toole, J. (2000, May/June). Don't hire the wrong CEO. *Harvard Business Review*, 78(3), 170–176.
- Bennis, W., & Thomas, R. J. (2002, September). Crucibles of leadership. *Harvard Business Review*, 80(9), 39–45.
- [13].Bies, R. J., & Moag, J. S. (1986). Interactional justice: Communications criteria of fairness. In R. Lewicki, & B. Sheppard (Eds.), *Trust in organizations* (pp. 246–260). New York: Bird, C. (1940). *Social psychology*. New York: Appleton-Century.
- [14].Bowl, C., & Scanlan, F. (2003). Study finds character, performance top qualities for leaders. Retrieved October 7, 2003 from: [http://www.shrm.org/press\\_published/CMS\\_00623.asp](http://www.shrm.org/press_published/CMS_00623.asp)

[15].Brenner, S., & Mollander, E. (1977). Is the ethics of business changing? Harvard Business Review, 55(1), 55–71.

[16].Bushman, B. J., & Baumeister, R. (1998). Threatened egotism, narcissism, self-esteem, and direct and displaced aggression: Does self-love or self-hate lead to violence? Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 75, 219–229.

[17].Cavanagh, G. F., & Bandsuch, M. R. (2002). Virtue as a benchmark for spirituality in business. Journal of Business Ethics, 38(1), 109–117. 20.Champoux, J. E. (2000). Organizational behavior: Essential tenets for a new millennium. Cincinnati South-Western College Publishing.