



Linking spiritual leadership and employee pro-environmental behavior: The influence of workplace spirituality, intrinsic motivation, and environmental passion



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ABSTRACT

Synthesizing theories of leadership, spirituality, and pro-environmental behavior, this research built and tested a theoretical model linking spiritual leadership with employee pro-environmental behavior via several intervening variables. Data were collected from professional employees across multiple industries in Thailand. We found that, as anticipated, spiritual leadership positively affected workplace spirituality, which in turn influenced both intrinsic motivation and environmental passion. These latter two variables then had a positive influence on pro-environmental behavior. Perceived organizational support moderated the link between spiritual leadership and workplace spirituality, whereas environmental awareness moderated the relationship between workplace spirituality and environmental passion.

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1. Introduction

Corresponding to an ever growing need to develop new leadership models that accentuate environment, sustainability, and social responsibility, without sacrificing profits (Fry & Slocum, 2008), more and more managers are coming to realize that they should encourage pro-environmental behaviors among their employees and strive proactively to improve their environmental responsibility (Aguilera, Rupp, Williams, & Ganapathi, 2007). Pro-environmental behavior at workplace entails that employees would help in improving corporation's green image among its stakeholders due to its non-obligatory, discretionary, and volunteer nature (De Groot & Steg, 2009).

In an effort to contribute to the nascent field of pro-environmental behavior at work (Turaga, Howarth, & Borsuk, 2010), we theorized about several psychological and social conditions likely to be associated with the pro-environmental behavior. Although a number of studies have investigated the impact of leadership on pro-environmental behavior of employees at

workplace (e.g., Flannery & May, 1994; Goldstein, Cialdini, & Griskevicius, 2008; Robertson & Barling, 2013), noticeably missing from research attention has been the effect of spiritual leadership on employee's pro-environmental behavior, despite suggestions by the environmental psychologists that altruistic or moral reasons guided by spirituality might engender pro-environmental behavior (Steg & Vlek, 2009).

In building a model linking spiritual leadership and pro-environmental behavior, we further drew on the workplace spirituality literature and the pro-environmental behavior literature to propose three mediating mechanisms with high potential to help explain linkages between spiritual leadership and pro-environmental behavior: workplace spirituality, intrinsic motivation, and environmental passion. Theoretical arguments have suggested that workplace spirituality makes a critical contribution to pro-environmental behavior by positively affecting an employee's higher-order spiritual needs, thus motivating him/her intrinsically (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009), but empirical evidence of such an effect has been lacking (Crossman, 2011).

According to Turaga et al. (2010), to engage employees into pro-environmental behaviors, just like intrinsic motivation, environmental passion has an equal, if not more important influence.

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Environmental passion is defined as a positive emotion that results in an individual wanting to engage in pro-environmental behaviors (Robertson & Barling, 2013). Finally, we further posited and tested two potentially important moderators of the spiritual leadership in our study—perceived organizational support and environmental awareness.

Perceived organizational support is a general perception of employees regarding the extent to which the organization values their actions and contributions, and cares for their well beings (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Previous studies have asserted that perceived organizational support positively affects the success of employees' environmental initiatives, participation, and efforts (e.g., Ramus & Steger, 2000). Furthermore, workplace spirituality fosters environmental passion, and this relationship is moderated by environmental awareness. Environmental awareness refers to the knowledge and concern of the impact of human behavior on the climate and environment (Madsen & Ulhøi, 2001).

Workplace spirituality also helps to increase the intrinsic motivation to protect the environment as it gives a deep inner purpose to think about the nature and then feel motivated to make the Planet a better place to live for the current as well as future generations. Overall, the purpose of this study is to build a model by conceptually and empirically linking spiritual leadership theory, workplace spirituality theory, and pro-environmental behavior theories in answer to calls for a more comprehensive and detailed understanding of the spiritual leadership approach as it relates to the pro-environmental behavior (Crossman, 2010; Hernandez, 2008).

2. Theory and hypotheses

2.1. Spiritual leadership and pro-environmental behavior

The organizations nowadays can be viewed as spiritual entities due to the fact that people spend a lot of time at their workplaces and hence their spiritual identities are embedded in their organizations (Benefiel, 2005). The question of concern is what leadership approach is most suitable to foster employee's pro-environmental behavior. The most rational leadership theory can be the one that causes the individual to genuinely think about the nature and environment as an integrated part of the self. This integration can be best explained by spiritual leadership which creates a strong association between spirituality and environmentalism (Shrivastava, 2010).

Based on a systematic literature review, pro-environmental behavior refers to a kind of volunteer behavior that consciously seeks to tackle environmental issues such as climate change, global warming, and environmental degradation, and minimize the negative impact of one's actions on the natural and built environment (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). Pro-environmental behavior at work is a type of pro-social behavior; it is not obligatory; it relates with a genuine concern for the Planet; it can only be displayed when an individual thinks of future generations, nature, and humankind (Paillé & Boiral, 2013; Scherbaum, Popovich, & Finlinson, 2008).

Fry and Slocum (2008) advocated that in order to maximize the triple bottom line (people through employee well-being, planet through environmental responsibility, sustainability and corporate social responsibility, and profit through financial performance and revenue growth), the most effective style of management is through spiritual leadership. Spiritual leaders develop values of hope and faith, and altruistic love in a compelling transcendent vision of positively serving community, future generations, and nature, by increasing intrinsic motivation and a sense of membership and being understood and appreciated, among followers (Fry, 2003).

Egri and Herman (2000) commented that characters of a spiritual leader such as his/her eco-centric approach, concern to preserve nature, strive to save environment for future generations, and strong intention to serve humankind through high morals and ethics, made them ideal to motivate employees to engage in pro-environmental behaviors. The focus of spiritual leadership is on collective social influence processes at workplace enabling employees to experience transcendence and find meaning and purpose in life (sense of calling), to enmesh in a network of social connections (sense of membership), and to align their personal spiritualities with organizational spiritualities (value alignment).

De Groot and Steg (2008) suggested that individuals with environmental values such as apathy for nature, personal inclination towards preserving the Planet, and eco-centric philosophy were more committed to display pro-environmental behavior. Spiritual leadership addresses the individual values through sense of calling and membership and thus may induce stronger environmental values into them. The level of autonomous motivation to engage in pro-environmental behavior increases when the individuals are imbued with stronger environmental values.

Pro-environmental behavior is a complex behavior because it involves pro-social dimension of work, and it is extremely difficult for managers to convince or motivate an employee to display such behavior through traditional leadership styles or approaches (Paillé & Boiral, 2013). Probably the most effective way to trigger pro-environmental behavior is arousing sense of deeper meaning in life, sense of community, care for the nature and planet, and convincing them that what they do today has a long term consequence on the society and the coming generations. This study proposes that one approach to do so is spiritual leadership.

According to Fairholm (1996), spiritual leaders lead people through intellectual discourse and dialogue, encourage self-directed free moral choice tasks for the betterment of society, and give meaning and purpose to them about their work roles. These behaviors are conceptually highly relevant to trigger pro-environmental behavior. For instance, spiritual leadership promotes employees' experience of transcendence through the work process to go beyond their own self-interests for the good of others and the society.

There is an evident connection of spirituality with nature, environment, and humankind (Taylor, 2001). Pandey and Gupta (2008) proposed that personal spirituality impacts one's environmental considerations. Shrivastava (2010) suggested that the emotional and spiritual development of an individual is indispensable for his/her behavior to save the environment and to display eco-centrism. Crossman (2010) mentioned that spiritual leadership embraces spiritual values and synergizes the spirit with the environment of the individuals. Therefore, spiritual leadership is one of the most effective leadership approaches when it comes to influence the employees to display pro-environmental behavior.

Hernandez (2008) suggested that spiritual leadership simultaneously integrates the three vital P's (Profit, People, and Planet). They not only take care of the Planet (through stewardship, Confucianism, encouragement of moral values) and the People (by empowering them and sharing power and responsibility) but also the Profit (through transformation of employees to feel self-worthy of achieving goals). Spiritual leaders implement stewardship and servanthood concepts that focus on sustainability through inter-generational reciprocity, community benefits, and nature preservation (Karakas, 2010).

Concepts like humility, volunteerism, compassion (Karakas, 2010), stewardship and servant-hood (Hernandez, 2008), sacred sense of calling (Fry & Cohen, 2009), and sense of meaning (Karakas, 2010), involve more about persuasion than force to engage in behaviors useful for the betterment of the world and

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