



Advancing workplace spiritual development: A dyadic mentoring approach

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ABSTRACT

Workplace spirituality has become the focus of several major business organizations and scholars. Research has found spirituality to be most beneficial when fostered at the individual rather than collective level (Herman & Gioia, 1998; Krishnakumar & Neck, 2002). Yet, little is known about how leaders deploy workplace spirituality to the individual level and sustain it over time. To address this question, the case is made that spirituality at work may best be fostered through a dyadic mentorship. Accordingly, a concept of spiritual mentoring is proposed, which takes an authentic self perspective to spirituality while approaching spiritual development as best served through a co-created, dyadic process. Drawing on previous research, spiritual mentoring is organized into three categories – inner life, meaningful work, and context/connectedness – and presented as a temporal process through which leaders may provide these supportive behaviors. Prospective outcomes of spiritual mentoring are described, and potential barriers are considered.

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“Never has there been a more exciting time for all of us to explore this next great frontier where the boundaries between work and higher purpose are merging into one”

[~ Sir Richard Branson (2011)]

Introduction

Major global organizations have embraced workplace spirituality in an attempt to reap the benefits associated with engaging the hearts and minds of their people (Fry, 2003; Mitroff & Denton, 1999; O'Reilly & Pfeffer, 2000). Coincidentally, in recent years, there has been a marked increase in theory and research on the influences of spirituality in the workplace. Despite this interest and the acknowledgement of spirituality's link to important workplace outcomes, we still know little about how the organization and its leaders can encourage individual spiritual growth at work. Encouraging spiritual development follows the emerging paradigm of spirituality at work, as it is congruent with the workplace literature's shift toward a concern for wholeness, a relationship focus, an emphasis on spiritual values, and the developmental purpose of work (Hogan, 2000).

Spirituality is considered a psychological characteristic encompassing meaningful life, wholeness, and interconnectedness with others (Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Scott, 1999). The literature on workplace spirituality further builds on this individual-level focus to characterize spirituality as a multifaceted concept encompassing (a) an intimate relationship with one's inner self, values,

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morality, and needs (Fairholm, 1997); (b) meaning and purpose through the transcendental experience of work (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003; Mitroff & Denton, 1999); and (c) a need for social connection or connectedness whereby one feels valued for his or her contributions to a group (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003; Pfeffer, 2003). Drawing on such nondenominational concepts of spirituality, Ashmos and Duchon (2000) take a systems perspective to consider an organization-level definition of workplace support for spirituality, defining it as: “recognition of an inner life that nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work that takes place in the context of community” (p. 139). Different streams of spirituality research generally tend to emphasize one facet of spirituality or another; however, all of the streams appear to agree on its deeply personal and intrinsic nature (Freshman, 1999; Krishnakumar & Neck, 2002). Spiritual leadership theory joins the macro-level perspective by explaining how leaders may motivate and encourage spirituality at work (Benefiel, 2005; Fry, Hannah, Noel, & Walumbwa, 2011; Fry, Vitucci, & Cedillo, 2005). Although spiritual leadership theory is concerned with individual growth and development (Ferguson & Milliman, 2008), in taking a predominantly organization-level approach, this literature focuses primarily on the development of an organizational culture of spirituality rather than on developmental leader behaviors (van Dierendonck, 2011). Accordingly, there appears to remain a gap in the rationale between the deeply intrinsic nature of workplace spirituality and existing conceptualizations of spiritual leadership. What is missing is the bridge between the macro-level practices suggested by leadership scholars and the micro-level concept of encouraging worker spiritual development. This missing link results in a lack of clarity about what kind of developmental behaviors are actually associated with spiritual leadership (van Dierendonck, 2011). Our objectives are to (1) explore the need for workplace spiritual mentoring, (2) describe the dyadic nature of spiritual mentoring, (3) detail the co-created unfolding of a spiritually-supportive mentor–protégé relationship, and (4) outline potential benefits of spiritual mentoring.

The key to strategic alignment and implementation may lie in the question: *How can workplace spirituality be best deployed to the individual level and sustained over time?* In search of an answer, we enter the discussion of leadership and employee spiritual development by extending Pratt and Ashforth's (2003) concept of an integrative nurture system to the micro level through the development of a concept and temporal sequence of spiritual mentoring. Congruent with the contemporary shift toward relationship-focused workplace spirituality (Hogan, 2000), this sequence is made tenable through dyadic workplace mentoring relationships. The close and personal nature of a dyadic mentorship provides the requisite identity-building support necessary to nurture and sustain individual spirituality over time. The concept of spiritual mentoring follows the stream of research which implies that spirituality results in enhanced personal development and organizational performance when fostered from an individual-centered view, rather than from an approach in which spirituality is cultivated in the entire organization (e.g., Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Herman & Gioia, 1998; King & Nicol, 1999; Krishnakumar & Neck, 2002). Building on this individual-centric approach to spiritual cultivation, we first discuss *spirituality* as an individual-level phenomenon by taking an authentic self perspective to spiritual growth. We then conceptualize and define *spiritual mentoring* and describe the dyadic process through which mentors may begin to meet protégé needs for spiritual development. This dyadic process serves to close the gap between the organization-level conceptualizations of spiritual support discussed in current literature and the individual-level concept of spirituality. As such, our contribution lies in addressing how leaders may best reap the benefits associated with spirituality through individualized mentoring.

Table 1
Spiritual mentoring compared with extant leadership theories.

Factor	LMX	TL	SL	AL	Spiritual mentoring (a framework congruent with spiritual leadership theory)
Centers on concern for people and relationships with others ^a	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Involves some extent of mentoring ^b	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Focus on appreciating, valuing, and empowering others ^c		✓	✓	✓	✓
Dependent on the development of a high-quality relationship ^d	✓			✓	✓
Assumes a supervisor–subordinate relationship ^e	✓				
Performance-oriented — the leader's motive is focused on organizational goals and outcomes (rather than on those of the individual employee) ^f	✓	✓	✓		
Supports the employee's unique exploration of work that the employee considers meaningful, rather than guiding them toward behaviors the leader desires ^g			✓	✓	✓
Employee retains the power to determine his/her own goals and objectives ^h				*	✓

Note: LMX = Leader–Member Exchange; TL = Transformational Leadership; SL = Servant Leadership; AL = Authentic Leadership

✓ Indicates that the factor represents an important aspect of extant theory

* According to Avolio and Gardner (2005), followers of authentic leaders “achieve goals that are, in part, derived from and congruent with those of the leader” (pp. 326–327)

^a Each of these theories to some extent draws on the seminal leadership themes developed by Blake and Mouton (1964) and Stogdill and Coons (1957).

^b Bass (1990); Graen and Scandura (1987); McManus and Russell (1997); Scandura and Williams (2004); Stone et al. (2004); Yukl (1989)

^c Bass (1990); Michie and Gooty (2005); Stone et al. (2004)

^d Graen and Scandura (1987); Illies, Morgeson, and Nahrgang (2005)

^e Scandura and Schriesheim (1994)

^f Bass (1985); Stone et al. (2004); Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, and Walumbwa (2005); Shamir and Eilam (2005); Sparrowe (2005); Yukl (1998)

^g Avolio and Gardner (2005); Greenleaf, 1970; Stone et al. (2004); Yukl (1989)

^h Avolio and Gardner (2005); Stone et al. (2004);

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