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Toward a theory of spiritual leadership

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Abstract

A causal theory of spiritual leadership is developed within an intrinsic motivation model that incorporates vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love, theories of workplace spirituality, and spiritual survival. The purpose of spiritual leadership is to create vision and value congruence across the strategic, empowered team, and individual levels and, ultimately, to foster higher levels of organizational commitment and productivity.

I first examine leadership as motivation to change and review motivation-based leadership theories. Second, I note the accelerating call for spirituality in the workplace, describe the universal human need for spiritual survival through calling and membership, and distinguish between religion and spirituality. Next, I introduce a generic definition of God as a higher power with a continuum upon which humanistic, theistic, and pantheistic definitions of God can be placed. I also review religious- and ethics-and-values-based leadership theories and conclude that, to motivate followers, leaders must get in touch with their core values and communicate them to followers through vision and personal actions to create a sense of spiritual survival through calling and membership.

I then argue that spiritual leadership theory is not only inclusive of other major extant motivation-based theories of leadership, but that it is also more conceptually distinct, parsimonious, and less conceptually confounded. And, by incorporating calling and membership as two key follower needs for spiritual survival, spiritual leadership theory is inclusive of the religious- and ethics and values-based approaches to leadership. Finally, the process of organizational development and transformation through spiritual leadership is discussed. Suggestions for future research are offered.



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Keywords

Spiritual leadership; Workplace spirituality; Leadership theory; Organizational culture; Leadership values

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