

Personal Research Focus:

Impact of Spiritual Leadership on Business Outcomes in a Hospitality Setting

Submitted as a component of the Workforce Education Doctoral Candidacy Examination

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Introduction/organization

This paper outlines my personal research focus and includes the following sections: Introduction (including organization), body, and references to date. The body is organized into four areas. They are: Desired career goal, Knowledge/skills required, Acquiring knowledge/skills, and Personal fit.

The subject of my research is spiritual leadership and its impact on customer outcomes in a hospitality setting. In my reading I found that there was much written about the positive impact that spiritual leadership has on empowered teams. Empowered teams are the subject of many articles relating to guest satisfaction in hospitality settings. Leadership in hospitality organizations presents special challenges especially with respect to involvement of the customer in virtually all processes and the intangible nature of service as a product. I would like to explore what facets of spiritual leadership are particularly effective in this unique setting.

Body

Desired career goal

I currently hold a faculty position as the Director of the Hospitality Leadership Institute at Penn State. I am interested in earning a Ph.D. in the field of Human Resource Development/Organization Development to enhance my credentials in this field. My academic background is entirely in Finance, but for the last 15 years I have been working with Penn State colleagues in Executive and Management Education in the Smeal College, Outreach, and the School of Hospitality Management.

I have been very successful in establishing Corporate/University educational partnerships but realize that I have been learning “on the job” and have very little theoretical background in this field. Further, I have become very interested in doing some research related to different models of leadership. I want to continue as a teaching faculty and Director of the Hospitality Leadership Institute at Penn State and use my dissertation research to add to my understanding of Organizational Development (OD) so that I can develop new products for OD consulting with a specialization in the hospitality industry. As I work

through the degree requirements I will also seek input from colleagues in the School of Hospitality Management. Dr. Anna Mattila and Dr. Michael Tews, two very renowned researchers in hospitality, have both expressed their interest in collaborating with me. So rather than to seek a new career goal, this degree is an opportunity for me to improve myself and my expertise in my present position.

Knowledge/skills required

- Structure – The field of practice that I wish to make a contribution to is Organization Development (OD). Within this field of practice I would like to focus on leadership in the hospitality industry, and specifically look at spiritual leadership theory as it relates to positive customer outcomes in hospitality operations. Leadership in hospitality operations has some unique features stemming from the simultaneous nature of consumption and production, and the intangible nature of service as a product.

Simply put, the overarching goal of hospitality is happy, repeat customers. Every system and process is built to exceed guest expectations and positively impact the intent to return. To understand all the aspects of leadership and service quality will require knowledge in the disciplines of industrial psychology, social psychology, operations management, consumer behavior, quantitative and qualitative research methodology, and learning theory.

- Nature - Leaders of Hospitality and other service organizations have unique challenges as compared to their counterparts in other industries. Food may be the primary product of a restaurant, but most of the “manufacturing” is done right in the same place that offers the service. Workers are expected to be friendly and cheerful toward both the customer (guest) and their co-workers. They are expected to care about what happens to the customer. The product is really the guest experience, which is not easily measured, and all leadership functions have to be performed in conjunction with the customer. Also a very high level of flexibility, coordination, and communication among labor-intensive systems and processes must converge to create a positive guest experience. While continuing to make sure that all systems and processes are aligned to drive guest satisfaction, the leader must also assure that the operation makes a profit.

Strategies for designing a process will be quite different depending on whether a service is being provided or a product is being manufactured and the degree of customer contact lies at the heart. The degree of customer contact in service organizations is higher because the customer takes an active role in the process itself. The level of contact is the extent to which the customer is present, involved, and receives personal attention during the service process. This contact, often referred to as *the moment of truth*, brings the customer and the service provider together. Therefore the leader must make sure that all employees are empowered to address customer needs in a real time basis because it is at that time customer attitudes about the quality of service are shaped. (Krajewski, L.J., Ritzman, L. P., & Malhotra, M. K., 2010)

Many studies have proved a positive correlation between happy employees and happy, loyal customers. Leadership theories have long tried to explain the best ways leaders can facilitate a motivated, engaged workforce. For the purpose of my research I want to explore ways in which spiritual leadership in particular, impacts employee commitment and in turn customer satisfaction in a hospitality specific service setting. Duchon and Plowman (2005) investigated work unit spirituality and performance in a large hospital and found there is a relationship between the climate of work and its overall performance. Workplace spirituality is defined as a workplace that recognizes that employees have an inner life that nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work that takes place in the context of community. This definition has implications for how leaders can enhance work unit performance by nurturing the spirit at work. Reave (2005), in her review of 150 studies is showing a clear connection between spiritual values and practices and effective leadership. Values that have long been considered spiritual ideals, such as integrity, honesty, and humility are demonstrated to be connected to leadership effectiveness and success. According to Fry (2011), a person's spirit is the vital force traditionally believed to be the intangible, life affirming energy in oneself and all human beings. Today, people as part of their spiritual journey are struggling with what that force means for their work. The model of spiritual leadership incorporates vision, hope faith and altruistic love, theories of workplace spirituality. The purpose of spiritual leaderships is to create vision and value congruence across the strategic, empowered team to foster higher levels of organizational commitment and performance.

Scholars have noticed a rising interest in workplace spirituality. This is not surprising since it has long been established that people have the intrinsic drive and motivation to learn and find meaning in their work and to be a member of a group in which they feel valued in return to their contribution to the group's performance (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003). Employee involvement is a key tactic for improving processes and quality. One way to achieve employee involvement is by the use of teams. Teams involve the use of employee empowerment that moves the responsibility for decisions further down the organizational chart.

In theorizing spiritual leadership, we focus on the collective social influence process that engages everyone and enables groups of people to work together in meaningful ways (Day, 2000). Spiritual leadership emphasizes this less leader-centric approach, focusing on engaging all group members to meet spiritual needs and enhance organizational commitment and performance. The positive relationships found between membership and organizational commitment, attest to the practical importance of establishing membership in groups through spiritual leadership. Indeed, we know that high quality relationships can serve to facilitate learning and action in groups (Balkundi & Kilduff, 2005).

According to Allen and Meyer (1990), organizational commitment has been conceptualized and measured in various ways. Many studies have been conducted to test aspects of a three-component model of commitment which integrates these various conceptualizations. The *affective* component of organizational commitment, proposed by the model, refers to employees' emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in, the organization. The *continuance* component refers to commitment based on the costs that employees associate with leaving the organization. Finally, the *normative* component refers to employees' feelings of obligation to remain with the organization. Allen and Meyer (1990) further demonstrated that occupational and organizational commitment contributes independently to the prediction of professional activity and work behavior.

Many findings suggest that instilling a sense of calling and membership in groups will foster high levels of team-member social exchanges. These recurring positive group interactions would have both individual and collective effects, as demonstrated, on performance outcomes. Individuals in empowered teams have a sense of ownership of the work and are

completely engaged in its tasks, which require their best thinking and creativity. They take pride in their work and are excited in having a sense of progress and seeing the results of their efforts. Empowered teams and their leaders should also establish a culture and ethical system that embodies the values of altruistic love where group members are challenged to persevere, be tenacious and “do what it takes,” to pursue excellence. Empowerment provides the basis for manifesting and experiencing the organizations culture that is centered on altruistic love. The purpose of spiritual leadership is to create vision and value congruence across the individual, empowered team and organization levels and, ultimately, foster higher levels of spiritual well-being whereby organizational commitment and organizational performance can not only coexist, but be maximized (Fry & Slocum, 2008).

This suggests that for better outcomes one should lead and manage by using values that drive fear and abuse out of the workplace and engage the hearts and minds of people. Support for autonomy and decision-making responsibility through self-managed, empowered teams and trusting people and letting them be who they are to use and develop their gifts and skills is essential. It is through this process that individual and team vision and values become integrated with the organization's vision and values. In sharing power, strategic leaders actually increase the total amount of power in the organization, thereby freeing people from leadership through fear, coercion, and over control. This allows them to utilize their talents and abilities in new ways.

Past research suggests that increased organizational commitment strengthens motivation and reduces turnover (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982) and that organizational productivity is at the heart of the total quality management movement. So one of my questions is if spiritual leadership improves the outcomes of empowered teams and empowered team improve customer satisfaction, is there a relationship that can be proved between spiritual leadership and customer satisfaction, and does that imply consideration of new service business models in hospitality organizations?

The conceptual distinction between spiritual leadership theory variables and other leadership theories and constructs needs to be explored some more. Empirical research is just beginning to examine the relationship between the qualities of spiritual leadership and organizational outcomes in some settings and finding a positive correlation (Fry, 2003).

Therefore is spiritual leadership a valid theory that can be widely applied as a model of organizational/professional development (Fry 2003)?

Acquiring knowledge /skills

Through the coursework identified in the Workforce Education Doctoral Program and additional coursework to be determined by my committee, I hope to acquire much of the needed skills set for researching. It is my hope to undertake both a qualitative and quantitative approach to this research topic. After some preliminary interviews of current industry professionals, a framework will be established which will lead to surveys of a population of current hotel CEO's, managers, employees, and customers. While I have taken extensive statistics during my MBA program, it was 25 years ago, and I will need to learn more advanced statistics in order to better understand scholarly articles and the appropriate methodologies for this research project. Additional courses in Research Methods, Psychology, Leadership, and Religion will be helpful in exploring my topic. A faculty internship in a hospitality organization and also a research paper and presentation will allow me to look at my topic through both academic and industry lenses.

Personal fit

During the past 15 years I have collaborated with subject matter experts on a portfolio of manager and leader development programs for the hospitality industry. This effort became an outreach delivery unit at Penn State called the Hospitality Leadership Institute (HLI) and can be visited at www.hli-psu.com . The HLI has secured over \$15mm in contracts and delivered 154 weeks of programs to professional audiences, whose enrollments total over 5,400. In the process of building these educational partnerships, I have become fascinated with the unique challenges of leadership in hospitality and am interested in making a contribution to the field by providing additional leadership options, development models, and perhaps new business models that are responsive to employees need for meaning at work, and thus produce better business outcomes.

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