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REVIEW

Spirituality and leadership in hospitality industry: A qualitative study from an emerging economy

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Researchers from the leadership and spirituality domain identified that spiritual leadership is one of the key leadership styles to transform the working environment of any organization. But the literature is scant that answers the key question: how a spiritual leader plays a role in transforming the organization to accept organizational change in post-coronavirus disease 2019 situation. Using the grounded theory approach, 16 face-to-face interviews were conducted at the top management level in the hospitality industry of Pakistan. The data were assessed using NVIVO software to develop themes and subthemes. The results indicate that leaders' own spiritual level and knowledge are critical to developing a positive relationship between a leader and follower and helpful in disseminating spiritual knowledge over time to accept the ongoing change in the organizations. Also, the respondents strongly emphasized uplifting the stakeholders, society, and followers as a whole. This study provides key insights for the theory and managers alike.

Keywords: leadership, spirituality, spiritual leadership, qualitative study

Introduction

The word spirituality brings with it the connotation of religion (1, 2). The terms spirituality and religion were often used interchangeably until the rise of secularism in the 20th century. At that time, some people felt that religious institutions inhibited individual experiences of the holy (3, 4). Nevertheless, studies have demonstrated that for many people, spirituality is no longer synonymous with religion (5, 6). In addition, many people identify themselves as spiritual but not religious. Although researchers have disagreed on definitions, they have followed this trend by expanding the definition of spirituality and assigning it a meaning that is distinct from religion (7–9). Guillory (10) described the living organization "as that continually adapts to a changing business environment" (p. 1). Researchers have suggested that to facilitate such a change, a spiritual-based firm is the organizational wave of the future (11, 12). The behavior and beliefs of a leader set the tone for the organization (13–15).

Therefore, the realization of a spiritual organization demands a spiritual leader.

The definition of spirituality continues to have little consensus among researchers, and the meaning of the word seems to shift over time, suggesting that previous definitions may need to be more accurate (5, 16). Nonetheless, much of the related literature has stated that spiritual leadership, with or without religion, is necessary to create a flexible learning organization to face the challenges of the 21st century (17, 18). Spiritual leadership, or whole-soul leadership, is listed as one of the five main perspectives of leadership that public managers use for effective management (19–21).

Researchers have noted that there is a need for individual, organizational, and societal change, and that change is occurring more rapidly than ever before (22, 23). Workers complain of a general lack of meaning derived from their work, stating that the workplace environment deadens their spirit (24, 25). Researchers have suggested that spiritual leadership is the key to facing change and creating a more

fulfilling workplace (26, 27). This research sought to address the problem that statements claiming that spiritual leadership is the key to creating organizations capable of facing the challenges of the 21st century still need to be supported by a sufficient evidence base. This study will help to fulfill the need for a complete model of spiritual leadership by shedding light on the ways in which some spiritual leaders have been able to influence organizational and social change as well as expounding their views on spirituality and religion.

Because a leader cannot be a leader without followers and "leadership is in the eye of the follower," some of these qualities must be determined by investigating what followers look for in a leader [(28), p. 29; (29)]. As Kouzes and Posner (28) pointed out, most literature about leadership overlooks the follower. Through their own research, Kouzes and Posner (28) questioned more than 7,500 managers about what they value or look for in their leaders. They found four characteristics that were consistent across the managers. Followers looked for leaders who were honest, competent, forward-looking, and inspiring. Honesty was the quality selected more often than any other (28, 30). The importance of honesty reflects the notion that the lack of honesty is a central downfall of many leaders. Honesty has consistently been crucial for the type of leadership sought over time, but it is critically needed today. The desire for honesty is inarguably tied to values, principles, and ethics, which many have claimed are the core of strong leadership (31–34).

Existing evidence has indicated that a shift to spiritual leadership would serve to improve society, allowing it to meet the challenges of a more intricate and tumultuous corporate world (35, 36). As organizations and their decisions continue to impact people's everyday lives, spiritual leadership development in the public and private sectors will positively influence society. Research to investigate the characteristics of spiritual leadership and methods for its development within organizations is well merited (24, 37). Having thus provided a background to the problem of a lack of the necessary type of leadership, the purpose of the study will be more succinctly stated. Therefore, the current study explores how spiritual leadership helps organizations to adapt to changes in the current turbulent environment after coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in the hospitality industry of Pakistan.

This study is significant because of the increasing agreement that a new type of leadership is needed to help current organizations thrive. Globalization, a weak economy, and increasing diversity have placed new demands on workers. Change is occurring rapidly, and organizations are attempting to respond successfully. Researchers have agreed that a new type of leadership must arise that is dynamic and flexible enough to meet organizational challenges (38, 39). Many have stated that spiritual leadership is the leadership of the 21st century, yet there is limited empirical evidence supporting these claims (24, 40). The research results are useful in increasing this body of evidence and

demonstrating the viability of spiritual leadership as a way for organizations to adapt to change. Although spirituality has played a central role in cultures throughout the world for centuries, it has been consciously separated from the education, government, and business sectors. This division has not stopped people from asking basic questions about their purpose and existence. Nevertheless, the need to face those questions in all areas of one's life may be taking its toll, and an increasing number of people are calling for a greater acceptance of spirituality in society.

Literature review

Leadership

Leadership has existed as a topic of fascination; initially, it was believed to be a quality that one was either born with or without. The field of leadership no longer adheres to this view, with researchers generally accepting the notion that leaders can be born or made, and various methods of cultivating leadership skills have been developed (13, 41). This has cleared the way for researchers not only to try to understand the basic nature of leadership but also to pinpoint the most effective types of leadership and ways to develop those characteristics. Although researchers have yet to reach a consensus on the most valuable type of leadership, the various definitions of leadership are similar. Gardner (42) defined leaders as "persons who, by word and/or personal example, markedly influence the behaviors, thoughts, and/or feelings of a significant number of their fellow human beings (…termed followers or audience members)" (pp. 8–9). Gardner's (42) reference to audience members conveyed the notion that leaders can exert a direct impact as well as an indirect influence through created works.

Palmer (43) defined a leader as "a person who has an unusual degree of power to project on other people his or her shadow, of his or her light" (p. 25), emphasizing the need for a leader to act responsibly, creating conditions that are illuminating rather than gloomy. Although no two leaders act alike, and even though different behaviors are called for in diverse situations, researchers have agreed that there can be both a good and a bad side to leadership. According to the definition, one cannot deny that Napoleon and Adolf Hitler were leaders, but their influences were far from positive. Leaders such as these clearly had charisma, defined by Weber (44) as a quality that, when present in a person or object, has the ability to produce "extraordinary powers" (p. 2), but their standards of ethics left many in the world frightened and/or distraught.

Spirituality and religion

The slow growth of spiritual leadership stems from a lack of agreement regarding the definitions of religion and spirituality. The terms religion and spirituality overlap and have been used interchangeably; therefore, it is necessary to look back at how their meanings have evolved over time in order to understand the importance of further study. Although the term spirituality seems to have gained more popularity than the word religion in recent decades, historically, this has yet to be the case. Religiousness refers to the internal and external portions of related beliefs and practices (45, 46). James (47), one of the first psychologists to study the function of religious institutions in influencing character, defined religion as "the feelings, acts and experiences of individual men in their solitude" (p. 32).

Earlier definitions reflected that religion can be a solitary or conventional system composed of beliefs and practices. Over time, a shift occurred in that religiousness became symbolic of the explicit actions related to particular religious beliefs (48, 49). This was followed by literature that disfavored religion, intimating that it was not as worthwhile as internal searches for meaning (50, 51). In contrast, the word spirituality, earlier considered under the domain of religion, came to represent all of the internal aspects, including a person's struggle to find meaning (52, 53).

Hicks (54) contended that the opposition of religion and spirituality is an incorrect dichotomy that ignores the complexity of their interrelationship. Undoubtedly, such a separation simplifies the profundity of the two terms, with the danger of criticizing religion as an unworthy pursuit of meaning (50, 55). Pargament (1997) warned that the division of religion and spirituality can lead to three dangers: ungrounded study, polarization, and losing our sacred core. First, researchers must resist the temptation to produce theories ungrounded in reality, unreflective of the views of people outside of their circle. Theories (56) must be tested, and research on spirituality should be compared with past definitions and measures of religiousness to ensure that value is added to earlier findings. This grounded theory study helped to splice these two terms and served as a comparison to earlier research.

Spiritual leadership

Just as research has revealed that spirituality is a dynamic and multifaceted concept, research also has shown that leadership, no longer viewed as simply a list of traits, is complex and contains many variables. Spirituality also has been acknowledged as a long-neglected dimension of leadership (1, 51) that has finally been able to capture attention because it encompasses the additional dimensions of a person, including the body, mind, and heart, as well as the spiritual aspects of an individual (57, 58).

Although accepting the whole person distinguishes it from other leadership forms, other leadership forms have highlighted essential components of spiritual leadership. Further, according to Kubicek (59), the latest leadership ideas center on the common desire for workers to find meaning and purpose in their lives.

Cardona (60) defined transcendental leadership as an approach in which there is a central concern for followers and their personal development as well as a desire to motivate them to help each other and contribute to the benefit of the group as a whole. In Sanders et al.'s (61) model, the three types of leadership are represented as three overlapping circles, suggesting that a leader must use skills from the three domains to be a complete leader. Those skills intersect in certain areas. The model also has a built-in hierarchy suggesting that transcendental leadership is the highest, most efficient form. Covey's (62) notion of principle-centered leadership placed a focus on creating more meaningful workplace relationships and successes, suggesting that this emphasis also leads to a more fulfilling and happy personal life. This process commences with acknowledging a principle-centered core within individuals and organizations. Such recognition allows fundamental questions to be addressed through a principle-centered leadership model.

Organizational change

The literature suggests that spiritual leaders may view and/or structure their organizations differently, resulting in positive organizational change. Greenleaf (63) suggested that the traditional organizational structure of a pyramid is "abnormal and corrupting" (p. 77). All people need help from colleagues; however, a pyramidal structure places one person at the top without equals. Situational leadership solves this problem by turning the pyramid upside down. Blanchard et al. (64) argued that there is no problem with a pyramid as a structure, but when people in the organization think in terms of a pyramid, problems arise. When the pyramid is upside down, the top person works for everyone else, ensuring that their people have the resources they need to meet their goals. This image matches well with servant leadership in that the leader is always servant first.

Fairholm (65) confirmed Jacobsen's (66) conclusions that spirituality plays a vital role in leadership, providing further evidence that established leaders and employees at other levels of organizations are searching for more than monetary compensation from their work. Fairholm used similar questions to survey midlevel managers, finding that, as was the case with the national and regional leaders in Jacobsen's (66) study, there is "a growing need for workplace cultures, leadership, and work processes that celebrate the whole individual with needs, desires, values, and a spirit self" (p. 12). Additionally, Zwart (67) used a quantitative

approach to expand upon prior research connecting transformational leadership and spirituality but found little relationship, contradicting earlier findings. Geaney (2003) researched spirituality and business transformation with 12 executive leaders. Using semistructured interviews and a survey instrument assessing attitudes about leadership, the researcher found that spirituality-informed leadership practices give meaning to the leaders' roles, concluding that spirituality is a component of some leaders' perspectives.

Isaacson (2001) explored the similarities and differences between 10 leaders nominated by the researcher's committee in exemplifying spiritual leadership. Each respondent participated in two interviews in which they described their perspective of spiritual leadership and its impact on their lives and work. Using NUD*IST software, Isaacson found that four stages of spiritual formation emerged: (a) spiritual awakening, (b) spiritual development, (c) the expression of this development in one's life and work, and (d) personal and spiritual fulfillment as a result of the three-stage process. Respondents represented a variety of faith backgrounds, and no questions were asked regarding beliefs about religion and if such beliefs may overlap or differ from views on spirituality. Isaacson also proposed that a possible future study could examine spiritual discernment and decision-making by spiritual leaders.

Methodology

Grounded theory studies are among the most common and influential types of qualitative research when the purpose of the researcher is to construct a theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1997; Castaño-Pulgarín, 2021). A grounded theory generates a theory from data collected through interviews (Creswell, 1998; Sepulveda-Escobar and Morrison, 2020). This study intended to build a theory based on the manner in which spiritual leaders influence organizational change. Data were collected until sufficient evidence was accumulated to create connected categories. Grounded theory research follows a prescribed set of steps throughout data collection and analysis. Although theories of spiritual leadership exist, few are grounded in the experiences of spiritual leaders. These theories lack completeness, and evidence is limited to the ways in which spiritual leaders influence organizational change. Further, definitions of religion and spirituality have been shifting, making it necessary to examine current views without imposing researcher bias.

Within qualitative research, there are many different traditions of inquiry, with five of the more popular being biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study (Creswell, 1998; Rapanta, 2020). The overall intention of this study was to move toward a holistic theory of spiritual leaders and show how those leaders foster organizational change; the grounded theory approach, therefore, was the most relevant. Although a phenomenological study would allow for the phenomenon of spiritual leadership to be investigated, the aim would not be to generate a theory. Researchers have stated that spiritual leadership is a viable method for creating successful organizations that can adapt to a rapidly changing marketplace. A grounded theory approach allowed a more insightful, firsthand look at the reasons for an increasing focus on spirituality and the ways that it can help organizations.

The target population from which the researcher intended to generalize results were spiritual leaders working within the hospitality industry; this is a growing group of people with limited knowledge. Leaders were defined as individuals who are in a decision-making capacity within organizations and who have been acknowledged to possess spiritual qualities by other members who have worked in some capacity with those people. Although a probability sample is the most scientific way to select a sample (Singleton and Straits, 2005; Sharp, Mcallister, and Broadbent, 2018), it was not plausible in this situation. The targeted population was relatively small and spread out; non-probability sampling was the best way to locate respondents. The sample was selected through snowball sampling. In this method, members of the target population were asked to refer others until a sufficient number of respondents were located (Singleton and Straits, 2005; Andreassen, Christensen, and Moller, 2020).

The researcher used non-probability snowball sampling to select spiritual leaders for the study. First, individuals known by this researcher who fit the category were selected and contacted via phone or e-mail to participate in the study. When participation was secured, and the consent form was returned, the interview date and time were agreed upon. Following the interview, participants were then asked to refer others whom they felt met the requirements of a leader who exhibits spiritual qualities by sending them the introductory letter in which the study was described, and directions were given on how to contact this researcher. Religion continues to play a prominent role in society; therefore, the spiritual leaders who participated may have been or are currently affiliated with a religious organization. Nonetheless, the criterion was that the respondents had to be considered as possessing qualities that are considered spiritual. When respondents were located, those respondents were asked to suggest other participants who fit the description. Theoretical sampling was also used as the study progressed if it was deemed necessary for a holistic theory to emerge.

Recommendations from others within organizations allowed the proper sample to emerge. Allowing colleagues to recommend spiritual leaders confirmed that the selected respondents were considered spiritual by others and displayed leadership qualities. The respondents were asked to share their views on spirituality and religion. Theoretical sampling was used if the initial sample was insufficient to create a grounded theory of spiritual leaders and organizational change. A total of 16 face-to-face interviews

were conducted and recorded after taking consent from the participants.

Results

The interview questions selected were deemed valuable in gaining further insight into the ways in which spiritual leaders view spiritual leadership and use it to promote organizational change. Thirty-one interviews were conducted, and analysis was performed using NVIVO software. Transcripts also were examined manually to ensure that the conclusions reached through an analysis were accurate, and peer review and member checks were performed for accuracy. First, demographics are reviewed, followed by an analysis of participants' responses to each question in the interview document. The analysis did not include non-verbal cues because of their limited and ambiguous nature.

Twelve interviewees felt that spirituality has to do with universal principles. One respondent stated, "To me, words come up like unification. I feel that religion divides and spirit unite, so spirituality to me is the universal principle." Eleven respondents also linked spirituality to developing a connection to humanity. Ten respondents also stated that spirituality is a source of meaning and purpose in one's life. One respondent stated, "I believe in my heart that every single one of us wants to feel like our lives matter, that we are not an accident, that we are not on this earth for no reason." Further, spirituality was expressed by 10 respondents as a way of or guide to living. "Spirituality is, to me, as a concept, a kind of a tool to help us live our life." Other views included a connection to nature. One respondent stated, "Mystical, mysterious experiences come through nature in special ways for me. I really find the experience of spirituality in my connectedness to the natural world." A connection to the spiritual world was also expressed. "Our society puts so much attention on the body part, which is actually only the vehicle, and we neglect the spirit part, which is our true essence that will live forever."

The respondents also viewed spirituality as a connection to or a belief in self. "Spirituality means knowing ourselves, carrying out or conducting oneself with this knowledge or awareness." It was also stated that spirituality was a holistic and all-encompassing concept. "By definition, you can't define it. Spirituality is always growing, and it's all-embracing." Respondents also expressed that spirituality is an innate part of every individual. "I think that spirituality is like the fundamental thing you are born with." One question also investigated the interviewees' personal views of how spiritual they consider themselves. Fourteen respondents felt that spirituality is of prime importance in their lives and that they are very spiritual, rating themselves as 9 or 10 on a scale of 1 to 10.

Ten respondents also noted that a spiritual leader should have a strong connection to the world and society and be "someone who would have great insights that connect to the larger picture, the greater good, looking beyond the individual or a group to more of the connections and how we are connected to the world, than our society." Helping others to develop spiritually was another theme present in 16% of the responses. "For me, a spiritual leader is somebody that helps others to develop spiritually." Five respondents also mentioned the ability to put others before oneself. "I think spiritual leadership must focus on sacrifice." Being motivated by love also came up in 6% of the responses. "They profoundly make decisions about life based upon love being the answer."

The third question addressed organizational change and the role of spiritual leadership in helping employees develop themselves and face changes in the workplace. The question was introduced by stating that organizations must face new challenges created by a rapidly changing global environment. The participants were then asked what they feel are the greatest challenges facing organizations today. Responses were wide-ranging, with the most common assertion (09) being the need to predict and adapt to change more efficiently. "I think that's one of the biggest challenges, to be able to adapt to change, and not necessarily react to change, but to be able to foresee change and adapt as it comes."

Seven respondents also considered dealing with a global marketplace and increased diversity a major challenge. "Organizations are forced to think globally, which means that they think globally and act locally, so you have to have a profound understanding of local markets." Five participants mentioned the need to serve customers better. "I think one of the greatest challenges is understanding stewardship. . .that when I serve others, I am better off because of that." Sixteen percent (5) of respondents also mentioned the necessity to display authentic concern for employees. "I find today because paradigms are shifting so fast, the worker because they look to certain things for security when the leadership is lacking in that direction or lacking totally, it really rattles the security of the workforce."

Discussion and conclusion

Findings revealed that spiritual leaders feel that spiritual leadership should increase in organizations and that it is of key importance in maintaining successful organizations' ability to meet current and future challenges presented by a fast-paced global environment through modeling appropriate behavior, clear communication, valuing others, and the acceptance and inclusion of spiritual development practices. Although not the direct focus of this research, views on spirituality and religion have been shifting, and it was deemed necessary to investigate these views further. As one participant stated, "It greatly depends on how you

define what's spirituality." The way spiritual leaders act in organizations is related closely to their views on spirituality and religion; examining their definitions allowed for further insights surrounding the topic.

The respondents also based their ratings on their own varying definitions of spirituality and religion and how they viewed the scale, making it difficult to compare ratings among people. Most commonly, the respondents seemed to view the scale as a way of measuring where they felt they were spiritual to where they wanted to be, but in other cases, the respondents viewed the scale as a comparison between themselves and others. "I don't know quite how to benchmark that with everybody else." In summary, most respondents viewed spirituality and religion as separate but related concepts; however, individual religious beliefs strongly influenced definitions of spirituality. Those respondents who were not strongly connected to religion were more likely to view spirituality as a broader and distinct concept. The participants also tended to focus more on spirituality as representative of a connection or relationship to a Higher Power, although many spoke of feeling connected to self, others, and nature. Through these connections, spirituality allows individuals to find meaning in their lives and address existential questions, such as the reason for or purpose of one's existence.

When defining spirituality, the spiritual leaders emphasized their connection with a Higher Power; in practice, however, spiritual leaders recognized the importance of valuing other people, placing them first. "To me, it's [spiritual leader] a person who understands the importance of the people who are under him and has a respect for their values and the things that are important to them in their life." Another respondent discussed the importance of sacrificing and serving others by stating, "I think spiritual leadership must focus on sacrifice... the spiritual leader creates and nurtures relationships through self-sacrifice building covenantal relationships rather than contractual relationships." Leaders also revealed that they use modeling to create the desired environment, leading by example. Although some leaders felt it appropriate to discuss spirituality with employees, this was not the case with many of the leaders. Even when organizations encourage such types of communication, leaders are careful to convey the appropriate message in a sensitive way.

Leaders also noted that they encourage workshops and retreats that allow employees to develop their relationships and interact more harmoniously. These programs are valuable ways to introduce principles that guide the desired behavior and instruct methods of dealing with difficult situations. Programs also help employees feel valued by the organization. These activities and education are especially important when helping employees adapt to change in the workplace. In addition, spiritual leaders reassure and encourage employees and attend to their needs.

Recommendations

The spiritual leaders in this study felt strongly that spiritual leadership should increase in organizations and in society in general. One respondent expressed, "I'm praying for more of it, especially in the community, for our kids and our families; we need more of it." Leaders realized that the word spirituality in the workplace is still not embraced, often because of its association with religion. This highlights the importance of properly educating employees through activities and workshops that were suggested as a method of helping employees to feel valued, although these programs do not necessarily need to bring in the word spirituality to be effective. One respondent stated, "In some cases, it [the word spirituality] would warrant renaming, doing exactly the same thing, but renaming it...for example, if you are going to have a "value the employee session," and within that, you are talking about spirituality." Placing other people first and valuing employees were key to transforming organizations.

The participants also discussed the necessity of leading by example, discussing spiritual/universal principles, providing a stabilizing influence, and building relationships. Communication in general, including reconciling differences, attending to needs, reassuring doubts, and providing empathy and encouragement, was viewed as an integral part of helping employees face workplace changes. In addition, the respondents expressed a benefit from participating in the interview. Several participants stated that it made them more aware of their own responsibility as leaders and more thoughtful about what else they could do to increase spiritual leadership in the workplace. This suggests that an ongoing dialog on the topic would promote spiritual leadership development.

Limitations

Research on spirituality and the importance of spiritual leadership in organizations is slowly increasing, but it still needs to be completed in many areas. The views on spirituality and religion are shifting, and researchers have presented varying definitions of these two terms. This research confirmed that definitions do, indeed, vary; however, the concept of spirituality generally is viewed as broader than religion. Definitions of religion and spirituality could be examined further with individuals from different faiths and with a larger population. Increasing numbers of people do not affiliate themselves with any organized religion but have strong spiritual beliefs. This group could be examined more closely. Further, this research highlighted the importance of investigating views of religion as well as of spirituality because spiritual outlooks are often strongly related to religious beliefs.

In addition, self-ratings on religion and spirituality may not be entirely accurate because numerical ratings are

subjective and fluctuate depending on people's feelings and definitions of spirituality and religion. Quantitative research in these areas should be approached cautiously and should be combined with qualitative methods to validate the findings. Research on spiritual leadership has made claims that this type of leadership is the new leadership for the 21st century. There is limited evidence, however, supporting such statements. This study attempted to shed additional light in this area to investigate further views on spiritual leadership and its relationship with organizational change. The respondents identified reasons why spiritual leaders contribute to the increased performance of organizations and their continued success in the future. More research could be done in this area by examining this relationship more closely and how spiritual leaders act and make decisions in the workplace compared to other leaders.

Conclusion

This research was guided by the question, "In what ways are spiritual leaders able to apply and develop spiritual leadership to increase their organizations' capacities to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing global environment?" Completing the open, axial, and selective-coding procedures generated the following conclusions addressing this question. Spiritual leaders value and are guided by their spiritual and religious beliefs. They seek opportunities to develop their spirituality primarily through meditation, prayer, worship, fellowship, reading, self-study, and participation in retreats and group activities. Their spirituality becomes an integrated part of their life and is infused in all aspects of their daily behavior, including their approach to leadership.

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