Spiritual Leadership of a Successful Project Manager

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Abstract

An Army acquisition project management office was noted as having an atypically high level of organizational commitment, which served as the catalyst for a qualitative study on the leadership within the office to determine the source of the organization's survey results. An in-depth semi-structured interview was conducted with the office's project manager on his leadership experiences and perceptions followed up by a focus group interview with eight of his subordinates that provided corroborating information about the project manager's leadership. A thematic analysis of the interview transcriptions provided in-depth operational model diagrams of the project manager's leadership paradigm that had some similarities to the spiritual leadership characteristics outlined in Fry's (2003) theory, which strongly suggested that the project manager probably portrays behaviors consistent with spiritual leadership. The analysis results also suggested that the project manager's leadership had a positive significant effect on the organizational members' commitment and productivity.

Keywords: spiritual leadership, program management, organizational commitment, productivity, thematic analysis, qualitative research

Spiritual Leadership of a Successful Project Manager

Results from a recent organizational climate survey by the United States Army of a program executive office revealed that one of its project management organizations had an organizational commitment that was significantly higher than both the United States Army average and the program executive office's results. This stimulated interest to examine the possible basis for the project management office's exemplary organizational climate, which served as a catalyst for this qualitative study.

Since the outcomes of Fry's (2003) spiritual leadership included organizational commitment and productivity, it was posited that the project manager (PM), whose organization obtained a higher than expected organizational commitment score on the command climate survey, might have possibly displayed behaviors consistent with spiritual leadership. As a result, the purpose of the study was to qualitatively explore if this PM's success can be attributed to the possible portrayal of spiritual leadership characteristics.

A qualitative study methodology was selected for this study since Fornaciari and Dean (2001) suggested that additional research on spiritual leadership should include in-depth studies using qualitative techniques. Nicolae, Ion, and Nicolae (2013) recommended that additional research is still required to overcome knowledge deficiencies, and strengthen model development that has resulted from nascent empirical research despite the fact that over the last decade empirical research has been conducted on Fry's (2003) spiritual leadership theory. Consequently, a qualitative study using thematic analysis was conducted on the leadership of this successful PM focused on his leadership experiences and perceptions using the characteristics of the spiritual leadership theory as a guide (Fry, 2003; Fry, Vitucci, & Cedillo, 2005). The study was performed using an open ended in-depth semi-structured interview (Patton, 2002) to address the following two research questions related to the PM's leadership. Does the PM portray spiritual leadership

characteristics? Can the positive organizational climate in the PM's project management organization be attributed to his leadership?

An overview of spiritual leadership theory, the study methodology, the research results, and a discussion of the results are presented for this qualitative study on the leadership experiences and perceptions of the apparently successful PM. The results of this study not only provided invaluable insights into how an exemplary leader can employ spiritual leadership to apparently generate an organizational climate of productivity and high organizational commitment, but this study provided a view of how spiritual leadership might be successfully employed within a governmental organizational context that emphasizes keeping church and state separate. Furthermore, using the in depth wealth of detailed information provided through a qualitative research methodology (Patton, 2002), the study provided an expanded detailed portrayal of the possible interrelationships of various aspects of spiritual leadership through a series of operational model diagrams that were generated from the thematic analysis of the interview transcripts. These diagrams provide an additional level of theoretically speculative insights beyond the model postulated by Fry, Vitucci, and Cedillo (2005) that may be useful in guiding future empirical research.

Spiritual Leadership Theory

Spiritual leadership is one of several ethical positivistic leadership theories (Yukl, 2013). Spiritual leadership theory is based on leaders providing a vision that generates a sense of calling and creating an organizational culture of altruistic love that engenders a sense of membership and appreciation within followers or employees (Fry, 2003). Fry (2003) contended that when employees' lives have meaning and they feel their efforts make a difference, it produces "a sense of calling" (p. 711). This sense of calling is generated from the congruence of the leader's

organizational vision with the employees' personal goals and values (Fry, 2003). Kotter (1996) posited that vision provides a shared view of the future that motivates employee efforts to work to build the future. This vision should inspire hope and faith (Daft & Lengel, 1998; Nanus, 1992) that Fry (2003) contended is the basis for the foundation for the belief that the organization will successfully achieve its mission.

Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003) pointed out that employees desire to discover work's meaning and to be part of a group that appreciates members' contributions. Fry (2003) maintained that employees feel a sense of membership when the organization's culture is centered on altruistic love. The definition of altruistic love within spiritual leadership is "a sense of wholeness, harmony, and well-being produced through care, concern, and appreciation for both self and others" (Fry, 2003, p. 712). Altruism includes the following values: "patience, kindness, lack of envy, forgiveness, humility, selflessness, self-control, trust, loyalty, and truthfulness" (Fry, 2003, p. 712). Psychology has shown that love can overturn the adverse effects of fear, anger, pride, and a sense of failure (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Furthermore, Fleischman (1994) and Maddock and Fulton (1998) maintained that the two critical requirements for spiritual survival in the workplace provided by spiritual leadership are the sense of calling and membership in an appreciative group. The ultimate results of spiritual leadership that supports employees' spiritual survival was posited to be organizational commitment (Fry, 2003), productivity and continuous improvement (Fairholm, 1998).

Methodology

Fry (2003) contended that the communication of core values by leaders through their vision and authentic behaviors will motivate team members. Spiritual leadership generates "a sense of spiritual survival" within the members by providing them with a sense of "calling and

membership" (Fry, 2003, p. 693). Fry (2003) posited that spiritual leaders construct a vision that provides a means to inculcate leader and organizational values within "empowered teams" that generates increased organizational commitment and productivity within those teams (p. 693).

Consequently, a qualitative study was conducted by examining the leadership experiences and perceptions of the PM, who served as a purposeful extreme theoretical-based (Patton, 2002) unit of analysis. The PM was purposely selected as the study's unit of analysis for an interview since he is the leader of the only organization within the program executive office whose climate survey indicated that its members' organizational commitment was significantly higher than the Army average. Furthermore, the PM was selected as the study subject since he had a reputation of portraying a positivistic leadership style which had attracted unsolicited individuals from other project management offices to request to join the PM's organization.

Consequently, it was anticipated that an interview with the PM would reveal information about his core values, leadership philosophy and style preferences required to address the study's two research questions.

Using the characteristics from the spiritual leadership theory, the study examined in depth the PM's leadership experiences to capture a wealth of detailed information that would not be provided through a quantitative study (Patton, 2002). Since leadership is an experiential phenomenon of the leaders' influence with their followers (Yukl, 2013), a thematic analysis of the leadership experiences and perceptions was conducted from the PM's perspective to see if the analysis of the interview transcript would provide information that might suggest that the PM portrayed spiritual leadership characteristics. The thematic analysis was also conducted to determine if there was evidence that suggested that the project management office's high organizational commitment might be attributed to the PM's leadership.

Since studies that rely solely on interviews with senior executives can be prone to provide unconscious inflated perceptions of leader actions and behaviors (Conger, 1998), a focus group interview with one of the study subject's subordinate project management teams was also conducted. Although the interview was primarily focused on the team's group dynamics, it included an open-ended discussion on team member perceptions of the PM's leadership on the acquisition product development team and its members.

Data Collection

Since a thematic analysis was planned to interpret the description of the leadership experience from the perspective of the study participants, the study began with an interview with the PM, who was the study's subject of interest based on his organization's unexpectedly high organizational commitment obtained during the recent climate survey. A voluntary confidential face-to-face interview was conducted after the PM was provided a full disclosure of the research intent (Qu & Dumay, 2011). The interview used open-ended semi-fixed questions to capture the PM's leadership experiences and perceptions.

The semi-structured interview methodology was employed in the study since it enabled the researcher the ability to tailor the interview to put the participant at ease (Cachia & Millward, 2011) while providing a framework to ensure that eight spiritual leadership characteristics were examined during the interviews (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Unlike structured interviews, the semi-structured interview provides the flexibility to explore unexpected issues raised by the participant (Cachia & Millward, 2011). During this study, the PM unexpectedly identified the uniqueness of his members' organizational commitment, which the researcher was able to explore since the semi-structured interview process was employed.

Spiritual leadership is an experience that is based on eight characteristics. These are: core values, vision, faith and hope, altruism, meaning and calling, membership, organizational commitment, and productivity (Fry, 2003; Fry et al., 2005). These eight characteristics were evaluated through the 19 open ended questions contained in the interview guide in table 1. Questions 1-2, 4-5, 8-9, 12, 14-19 in the interview guide provided indicators of whether the PM displayed the characteristics of a spiritual leader. Together they addressed the first study question: does the PM portray spiritual leadership characteristics? Questions 3, 6-7, 10-11, 13, and 17-19 in the interview guide provided indicators on the impact of the PM's leadership on his organization and direct reports. Together they addressed the second research question: can the positive organizational climate in the PM's project management organization be attributed to his leadership? The thematic analysis (Hartman & Conklin, 2012) of the PM's answers to the interview guide questions from table 1 provided during the audio taped semi-structured interview were used to assess the two study questions.

The study also included the collection of data from a focus group of subordinates who are part of an acquisition product development team overseen by the PM. The interview included one open-ended question on the PM's leadership that provided significant insights that supported the perceptions on the leadership experiences described by the PM in his interview. The focus-group discussed the following question related to the PM's leadership: what support is provided by the external leadership when needed by the product development team?

Data Analysis

The study employed thematic analysis (Hartman & Conklin, 2012) to analyze the data on the leadership experiences and perceptions of the PM. Thematic analysis provided a methodology to interpret the information (Hartman & Conklin, 2012) from the transcription of

Table 1

Interview Guide – Spiritual Leadership

Characteristic	Questions	
Core values	Could you please describe your core values? What is the source of your core values? How have your core values impacted your leadership?	
Vision	What is your vision for your organization? What is the source of your vision? What is the impact of your vision on your leadership? What is the impact of your vision on your direct reports?	
Faith & hope	What do you have faith and hope in? What is the source of your faith and hope? What role does faith and hope have on your leadership? What is the impact of your faith and hope on your organization?	
Altruism	What role does altruism play in your leadership?What is the impact of altruism on your leadership?	
Meaning & calling	What does your job mean to you?How has your leadership influenced your direct reports' feelings about the	eir jobs?
Membership	How would your describe your organization?How has your leadership affected the direct reports' feelings about the organization?	
Organizational Commitment	. How has your leadership effected your direct report's organizational comm	nitment?
Productivity	How has your leadership had an impact on the productivity of your direct and teams?	reports

the recorded interview with the PM. Thematic analysis is a process that analyzes the qualitative information by identifying a code (Hartman & Conklin, 2012), which is a word or phrase, that captures the essence of the meaning of each of the segments of interview transcription text (Saldana, 2013). These codes were analyzed to identify patterns, which were grouped as themes (Boyatzis, 1998). Themes are "a pattern found in the information that at minimum describes and organizes the possible observations and at a maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon" (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 4). Using this process PM replies to open-ended interview questions were converted into thematic variables that were analyzed (Boyatzis, 2011) to determine the essence

of the PM's leadership experiences and the existence of evidence to address the two research questions.

For this study initial coding was conducted on the interview transcript validated by the study subject using primarily in vivo coding. In vivo coding is a short quotation from the transcript (Saldana, 2013). Only where the in vivo code could not be adequately understood outside of its spoken context, descriptive coding was employed (Saldana, 2013). Descriptive coding abridges the essence of the data segment into a word or short phrase (Saldana, 2013). After combining similar in vivo codes, like "empowers" and "empowered" into one descriptive code, 121 initial codes were identified. These initial codes were consolidated and clustered into related coded data using pattern coding (Saldana, 2013) that identified 62 categories, which are "meaningful and parsimonious units of analysis" (Saldana, 2013, p. 210). These categories were further analyzed using axial coding to identify the interrelationships between the categories (Saldana, 2013). Using a process known as "themeing the data" (Saldana, 2013, p. 175) an analysis of the integration patterns of the categories generated nine themes. These themes were further analyzed to determine the pattern interfaces, which were used to create the study's operational model diagrams (Saldana, 2013) that depicted the essence of the PM's leadership experiences and perceptions.

The focus group responses to the open-ended question about the PM's leadership was also analyzed using a thematic analysis. This analysis captured the essence of the subordinate's perceptions of the behaviors and actions of the PM as they related to the team and its members.

Validity and Reliability

The validity of a qualitative study is based on the data being interpreted correctly (Kirk & Miller, 1986); the reliability is based on "the degree to which the finding is independent of

accidental circumstances of the research" (Kirk & Miller, 1986, p.20). The trustworthiness or rigor of the study involves credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). The rigor of this study was based on several factors. The study included the PM's review of the interview transcript to ensure its accuracy, and the first coding of the transcript primarily used in vivo coding to minimize potential investigator bias. Only in instances where an in vivo code would not be understood outside of the context of the transcript, the researcher used descriptive coding (Saldana, 2013) to augment in vivo coding. To ensure the credibility of the study results, a triangulation of multiple second coding methods was employed to generate the categories and themes using the rigorous thematic analysis process (Boyatzis, 1998). The second coding used a combination of pattern and axial coding, and the "themeing the data" process that produced operational model diagrams that depict the interrelationships of categories and themes (Saldana, 2013, p. 175). Lastly, the draft study report, without the interview comments and perceptions of the focus group, was reviewed by the PM to ensure that the categories and themes accurately depicted the PM's viewpoints on his leadership characteristics. The focus group interview transcript was also reviewed by the subordinate product development team leader to ensure that it accurately depicted perceptions of the team.

Results

The thematic qualitative study was conducted on the PM, whose organization had a significantly higher organizational commitment than the Army or program executive office average, to understand if this PM's success can be attributed to his possible portrayal of spiritual leadership characteristics. An open-ended semi-structured interview was conducted with the PM using a questionnaire based on the eight characteristics derived from Fry's (2003) spiritual leadership theory. The results are presented through a demographical depiction of the study's

unit of analysis and focus group interview participants, and a description of the codified themes from the interview transcripts. These themes consist of: core values, vision, faith and hope, trust in people, altruism, calling and meaning, membership, organizational commitment, and productivity. Furthermore, the study results included a presentation of the focus group's perceptions of the PM's leadership behaviors, which corroborated many of the PM's interview responses.

Sample

The study consisted of an interview with a purposeful extreme theoretical-based sample that consisted of the PM. The PM was in his fifties. He has extensive leadership and acquisition experience. He has 27 years of leadership experience which included 20 years in program management at various levels. He has seven years' combined project management experience. He had been leading his current project management office, which he established, for the last three and one half years. The mission of the PM's current organization was to conduct the research, development, test and evaluation, procurement, and life cycle support for military equipment for the Department of Defense. The PM led an organization with 22 subordinates, which was divided into three different teams.

A focus group interview was also conducted with eight of the PM's subordinates. The focus group consisted of four men and four women. The ages of the participants ranged from 23 to 60 with the majority of the participants in their thirties. Most of the participants were assigned to the organization between one and two years; which provided them time to not only view the PM's behaviors and actions but also formulate opinions based on their perceptions.

Core Values

As depicted in figure 1, the PM's (personal communication, February 2, 2015) core

values are "integrity," and altruism, which he described as treating "others as you would like them to treat you, and love thy neighbor." These core values drive all his other "values and norms" (PM, 2015). The source of his core values are his "Christian beliefs" (PM, 2015). His core values provide a "foundation" for his leadership (PM, 2015). His core values gives his leadership "balance" and results in inspiration, and motivation for his direct reports. The PM (2015) pointed out that leaders must balance "mission accomplishment" with meeting their "people's needs." The PM (2015) explained that his organizational members are inspired to "want to work for" him and are motivated to "push for your same goals" because a balanced approach results in member needs being addressed.

Vision

As illustrated in figure 2, the PM's (2015) vision is the "underlying foundation" for the organization activities" since it provides direction and guidance. It bounds and shapes the organization (PM, 2015). The vision keeps the organization "within the guidelines and it pushes

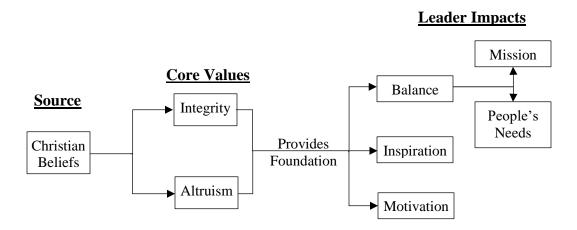


Figure 1. Core values theme and the eight associated categories. The core values of integrity and altruism are based on Christian beliefs. These core values provide the foundation for balance, inspiration and motivation. Core values enables balance of mission accomplishment with people's needs.

people in the right direction" (PM, 2015). The vision also lets the organizational members "know what is important and the priority" (PM, 2015).

The PM's (2015) vision was derived from three different sources: higher headquarters, the external community, and the acquisition processes. For the vision to be viable it must be "nested with the larger organization's vision" (PM, 2015). It is shaped through "understanding the community" that the organization operates within, which includes external stakeholders such as other agencies, the military departments, the combatant commanders and industry partners (PM, 2015). Furthermore the vision was directly impacted by the PM's (2015) "understanding acquisition" processes, which includes "what works and what doesn't work."

The PM (2015) indicated that ensuring his organizational members understand his vision "is the most important thing" since it empowers his subordinates." The vision provides his direct reports with the "authority to do what they need to do" so that they do not have "to ask permission for everything" (PM, 2015).

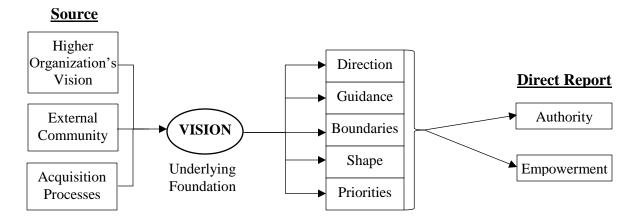


Figure 2. Vision theme and the ten associated categories. Vision is derived from the higher organization's vision, the external community and the acquisition processes. The vision provides an underlying foundation for the organization's direction, guidance, and boundaries; it shapes and prioritizes the organization's activities. The vision empowers the direct report and provides them with authority to act.

Faith and Hope

As portrayed in figure 3, the PM's (2015) "faith and hope is God." It is based on his "strong Christian belief." His faith and hope provides him with a "positive attitude" that "filtrates down to the organization" (PM, 2015). Faith and hope provides the leader the "balance" to not only perform the mission but to "care about others" that includes understanding his "peoples' needs," which involves helping them "to meet their goals" (PM, 2015). Additionally, the PM's faith and hope serves as the basis for his ethics, which is "knowing what's right and morally correct" that enables the leader to achieve his mission "without hurting someone else" (PM, 2015). These ethics provides the PM (2015) with the ability "to set the example for his people," which engenders the organizational members' trust in the leader.

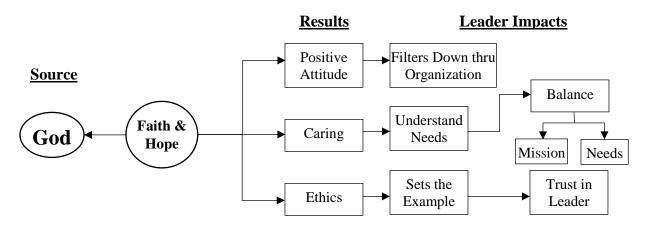


Figure 3. Faith and Hope theme and the 11 associated categories. Faith and hope in God results in a positive attitude, caring for others, and an ethical foundation. The contagious positive attitude filters down through the organization; caring helps the leader understand others needs providing a balance between the mission and needs. Ethics provides the foundation for the leader to set the example which generates organizational member trust in the leader.

Trust in People

As pictured in figure 4, the PM (2015) believes that it is important to trust his "people to do what they need to do" and "believe they can make it happen." The PM's (2015) trust in his organizational members provides them the freedom to be creative, which facilitates their growth and "achievements" that enhances the organization's effectiveness. The PM's (2015) trust in his organizational members facilitates teamwork within the organization, which along with achievement increases team productivity.

Altruism

As depicted in figure 5, the PM's (2015) altruistic behaviors include "care, concern, and appreciation for others." The PM (2015) indicated that leaders must "take good care" of their team "just like you would your family." He considers his organization as his "second family" (PM, 2015). This requires the leader to know his people and teams in order to understand "what their needs are" (PM, 2015).

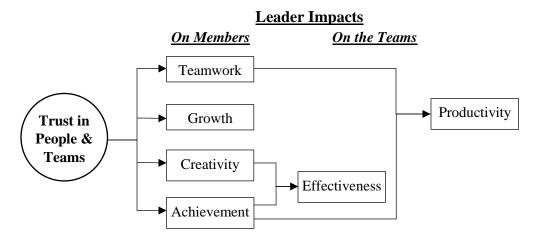


Figure 4. Trust in people and teams theme and the six associated categories. Leader trust in the people encourages teamwork, growth and creativity, and facilitates achievement. Creativity and achievement enhances organizational effectiveness, while teamwork and achievement increases productivity.

The PM (2015) is also concerned about the welfare of his people. By "being in touch" with them, the PM is able to identify when things are "a little out of whack" (PM, 2015). This enables him to identify and correct problems, which make his teams more efficient and effective (PM, 2015).

The PM also believes that that it is important to express "appreciation" to organizational members for their contributions to the organization (PM, 2015). The PM (2015) indicated that this is accomplished by providing recognition for accomplishments not only through rewards and increased compensation but also by "a pat on the back."

The PM (2015) indicated that his altruistic leadership resulted in changed attitudes in his people and their job satisfaction. When people are appreciated it results in a "change in their

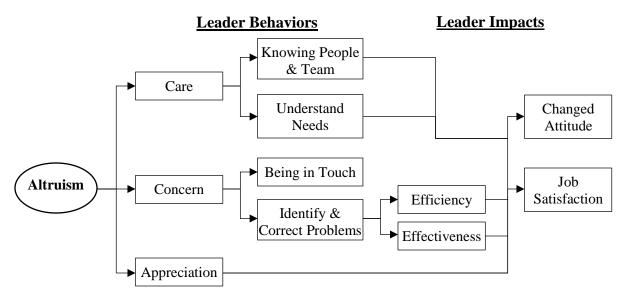


Figure 5. Altruism theme and the 11 associated categories. Leader altruism results in the following leader behaviors: care, concern, appreciation. Care is displayed by knowing the people and the team and by understanding their needs. Concern is portrayed through being in touch with subordinates and identifying and correcting problems of organizational member concern. Fixing problems results in efficient and effective teams. The ultimate impact of altruistic leadership are changed organizational attitudes and job satisfaction.

attitude" based on reduced stress that comes from the lack of needing to worry about the boss' view of their job performance (PM, 2015). The changed attitude, which is "kind of like weight taken off their shoulders," results in changed organizational member behaviors (PM, 2015). Instead of worrying about their job status, employees are able "to make [their] priority getting the job accomplished" (PM, 2015). Additionally, altruistic leadership provides the organizational members with "a good feeling that they like where they work, and they like what they do" (PM, 2015).

Calling and Meaning

As illustrated in figure 6, the project management job provides the PM with a mission that provides "a sense of satisfaction" that his efforts are making a difference as he achieves his vision to get equipment needed to support the warfighters (PM). The PM indicated that the example he portrays and how he feels about the mission helps to unify the organization, since they result in "the organization having everybody believe in one thing and accomplishing a common goal." This resulted in organizational "synergy," which strengthens the organization (PM).

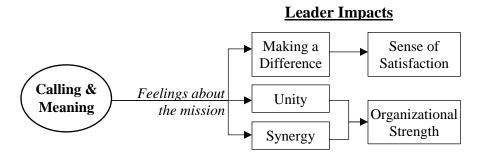


Figure 6. Calling and meaning theme and the five associated categories. Feelings about the mission provide a feeling of making a difference and a sense of satisfaction. Feelings about the mission also facilitates organizational unity and synergy which enhances organizational strength.

Membership

As portrayed in figure 7, The PM's (2015) organization is "very collegial, trusting, caring; it's almost like a family." The PM (2015) indicated that the positive organizational culture was

cross team, . . . which is really unique because I have been in a lot of organizations where you may have one good team, but they focus just on their team. But our organization is different. . . our office sometimes takes work home with them and bring people over to their house to all work together almost like you did in college days as a study group. I have never seen that in any other organization.

The PM (2015) indicated that the organizational culture is based on "caring about the warfighter, and getting the job done." The PM (2015) pointed out, that it is "also got to do with caring about your fellow team worker." The PM (2015) noted that the organizational members are "truly like

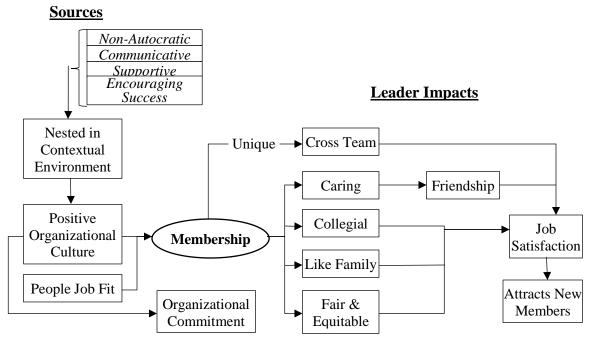


Figure 7. Membership theme and the 12 associated categories. Sources of membership are positive organizational culture and people job fit. Positive organizational culture comes from being nested in the contextual environment. Membership in this PM office is uniquely cross team. Membership results include a caring, collegial, family like, and fair & equitable organization that engenders friendship, breeds job satisfaction, and attracts new members.

close friends; they care about each other." The organizational members feel "they have a supporting role to each other and the organization, and they are tied together like a chemical bond" (PM, 2015).

The PM (2015) pointed out that the organization culture, which provides a sense of "family," has resulted in employee job satisfaction. The PM (2015) noted that "the people who work here like this organization for what it is and they feel comfortable working here." Because of this new members have been attracted to the organization (PM, 2015). The PM (2015) pointed out that "instead of trying to find a way out of this organization, most people would like to find a way in."

The PM (2015) indicated that the organizational culture is based on a combination of "the people that were hired" and how leadership treats the organizational members. The PM (2015) stated that people were hired based on their "personalities;" they are not only "go getters and doers" but "people who work well together." Furthermore, the PM (2015) noted that leadership that treats "everybody fairly" and treats "everybody the same" facilitates teamwork and engenders a "climate of appreciation." The PM (2015) also pointed out that his organization was established after the arrival of new leadership at the program executive office, which changed the culture of autocracy to a communicative and supportive culture that encourages and facilities the success of subordinate project management offices. The PM (2013) posited that this cultural change supported him "creating something different" and enabled him to take his organization "to the next level."

Organizational Commitment

As pictured in figure 8, the PM (2015) noted that he leads the organization by setting "the vision and" providing "guidance." He provides "the foundation" for a positive organizational

climate by setting the example, which "infiltrates down to the rest of the organization" (PM, 2015). This has resulted in organizational member job satisfaction based on their sense of membership, which has enhanced their commitment to the organization (PM, 2015). The members "good feeling" about the organization has also attracted new members to the organization based on the organization's sense of family (PM, 2015).

Sources

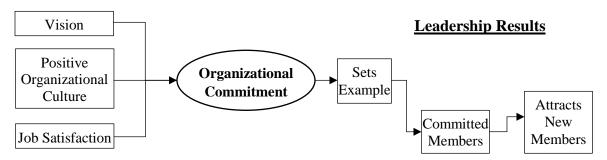


Figure 8. Organizational commitment theme and the six associated categories. Sources of organizational commitment are vision, positive organizational culture and job satisfaction. Leader results include example setting, and committed members, which attracts new members.

Productivity

As illustrated in figure 9, the PM's (2015) organization has been very effective in meeting goals. As noted by the PM (2015), this is because the organization "works very well together." This teamwork can be attributed to the satisfaction and commitment of the organizational members (PM, 2013). The PM (2015) pointed out that the project management office is a growing entrepreneurial organization in an austere budget constrained environment. "To have this kind of success in this type of budget climate is almost impossible," which is "proof in the pudding of productivity" (PM, 2015). The PM (2015) also stated that "I think our organization is one of the most efficient and effective organizations that I have seen in my 27

year career. I am very proud of the people and very honored to work here"

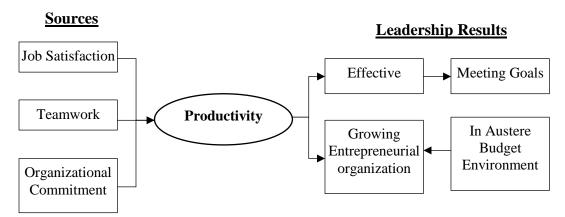


Figure 9. Productivity theme and the seven associated categories. Sources of productivity are job satisfaction, teamwork, and organizational commitment. These result in effective operations that meet organizational goals and a growing entrepreneurial organization despite an austere budgetary environment.

Focus Group Perceptions on the PM's Leadership

The focus group noted that the PM provided great support to the acquisition product development team. Instead of being autocratic, the project manager listened to people's concerns (team leader, personal communication, April 14, 2015). The project manager did not admonish the team for being honest and open about issues (deputy team leader, personal communication, April 14, 2015). This was because the project manager valued everyone "no matter what their level is" (test engineer, personal communication, April 14, 2015). Additionally, the project manager puts "people first;" he is concerned about their emotional wellbeing due to the associated project related stressors (team leader, 2015). Rather than being insulated, the project manager is engaged with his people (test engineer, 2015). Furthermore, the project manager empowers his people by giving them the freedom to execute (lead test engineer, personal communication, April 14, 2015). The lead test engineer (2015) noted that "I have liberties to

execute without constantly having to check in." Finally, the lead system engineer (personal communication, April 14, 2015) pointed out that "the number one thing I appreciate from management" is when they "have your back."

Discussion

The object of this thematic analysis was to examine two research questions. The first question was, does the PM portray spiritual leadership characteristics? The second question was, can the positive organizational climate in the PM's project management organization be attributed to his leadership? The study was conducted through an in-depth open-ended semi-structured interview using questions from the interview guide that were focused on soliciting a description of the experiences and perceptions of the subject's leadership. 13 of the interview guide's 19 questions were focused on identifying if the PM's leadership paradigm was congruent with the eight characteristics of spiritual leadership posited by Fry (2003) in his theory. Nine of the questions from the interview guide examined the impacts of the PM's leadership on his organization and its members to identify if the positive organizational climate reflected in the organization's recent command climate survey can possibly be attributed to his leadership.

Operational Model Diagram of the PM's Leadership Experiences and Perceptions

Nine different themes emerged from the thematic analysis of the transcribed interview with the PM on his leadership experiences and views of those experiences. The operational model diagram in figure 10 portrays the leadership philosophy of the PM derived from an analysis of the themes that emerged from the thematic analysis. The figure depicts the interrelationship of the themes and the potential impacts of the PM's leadership.

The PM's (2013) faith in God inspired his core values of integrity and altruism. The caring, concern and appreciation expressed in the PM's (2013) altruistic leadership appeared to

result a sense of membership, which seemed to have enhanced job satisfaction and commitment of his organizational members. The results of the study also suggested that the PM's (2013) altruistic leadership facilitated a positive organizational climate not only within individual teams but across teams that resulted not only in increased job satisfaction of the organizational members but probably intensified their organizational commitment.

The PM's (2015) vision, which was the underlying foundation for the organization's activities, provided organizational members with the authority to do their jobs. The PM (2015) posited that his vision, along with his trust in his people, empowered them to perform their jobs within the bounds of his vision. This trust appeared to have engendered teamwork and spawned creativity, which would likely have enhanced the productivity of the organization (PM, 2015). The vision and the leader articulated feelings about the mission seemed to have facilitated a sense of calling and meaning for the members within the organization since it helped the

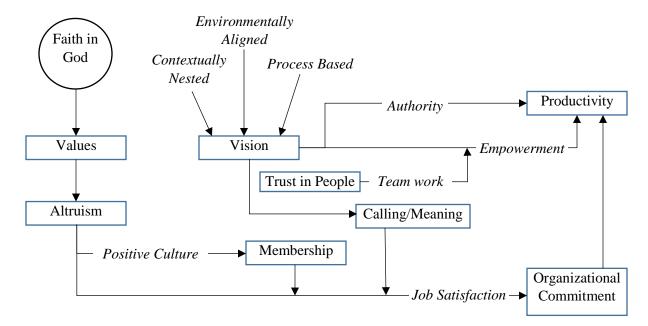


Figure 10. Project manager (PM) leadership operational model diagram depicting the interrelationship of the nine themes derived from the thematic analysis of the PM's interview transcript.

members understand the importance of their jobs and how their efforts make a difference to the warfighters and the security of the nation (PM, 2015). Calling and meaning appeared to have provided a sense of satisfaction for organizational members that enhanced organizational commitment (PM, 2015). Lastly, the results of the study suggested that productivity within the PM's (2015) organization is probably enhanced by the increased commitment of organizational members.

The results of the thematic analysis of the PM interview transcript were analyzed to determine if evidence existed to address the two research questions. These included an examination to see if the data supported the possibility that the PM displayed spiritual leadership characteristics, and if the PM's leadership facilitated a positive organizational climate required for the organization's success.

PM's Display of Spiritual Leadership Characteristics.

An examination of the PM's responses during the 13 interview questions related to spiritual leadership strongly suggested that the PM portrayed spiritual leadership characteristics. Fry (2003) posited that spiritual leaders must understand their core values. During the interview the PM unhesitatingly articulated his core values of integrity and altruism. He indicated that the source of his core values was his Christian beliefs (PM, 2015), which are not subjective but immutable. His core value of integrity is one of three high core values, which according to Lee and Elliott-Lee (2006), are non-negotiable enduring principles. Furthermore, Fry (2003) noted that integrity is one of eleven "personal affirmations" of the "values of hope/faith and altruistic love" within the spiritual leadership construct (p. 712). The PM's (2015) second core value of altruism, which he described as both the golden rule and as "love thy neighbor" also happens to be one of the eight characteristics of spiritual leadership posited by Fry (2003). Fry et al. (2005)

posited that altruistic love is "a sense of wholeness, harmony, and well-being produced through care, concern, and appreciation for both self and others" (p. 844). Similarly, the PM (2015) explained that leaders must "take good care" of their team "just like you would your family." Since he considered his organization as his "second family," his balanced focus enabled him to address organizational member concerns by helping them meet their needs (PM, 2015). Additionally, the PM (2015) has provided an appreciative climate within his organization as substantiated by his subordinates during the focus group interview. The PM puts his people first and is concerned about their emotional wellbeing (team leader, 2015). This is because the PM values everyone regardless of the position within the organization (test engineer, 2015).

Fry (2003) contended that vision is "of utmost importance" since it provides the direction for the organization (p. 711). Similarly, the PM (2015) explained in his interview that vision is the "underlying foundation" for the organizational activities" since it provides direction and guidance. Fry (2003) noted that vision simplifies decision making and coordinates the actions of organizational members. Correspondingly, the PM (2015) elucidated that his vision empowers his direct reports and provides them with the authority to act since they do not have "to ask permission to do everything." The focus group agreed that the PM empowered his people by giving them the freedom to execute their tasks "without constantly having to check in" (lead test engineer, 2015).

Fry et al. (2005) defined faith and hope as "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction that the organization's vision/purpose/mission will be fulfilled" (p. 844). Fry (2003) noted that faith and hope provide the assured belief that the organization will successfully accomplish its vision and mission. In his interview, the PM (2015) stated that faith and hope originated from his belief in God and that this provided him with the ability to have faith in his

team and hope for success. The PM (2015) also expressed that this resulted in his ability to trust his subordinates to "make it happen." The lead test engineer (2015) stated that "I appreciate the management's allowance and empowerment of the people to do and complete" the tasks.

Although Fry (2003) did not include trust within the scope of faith and hope, he did include trust as one of the "qualities of spiritual leadership" within the characteristic of altruistic love (p. 695). Fry (2003) noted that the spiritual leader's vision must facilitate cooperation and trust within the organization.

Fry (2003) also contended that calling is the way individual's feel when their service to others makes a difference, which ultimately provides "meaning and purpose in life" (p. 703). The PM (2015) indicated that the importance of his mission provides "a sense of satisfaction" since he knows his organization supports the nation's defense by providing warfighters with the best affordable capabilities possible. The PM (2015) noted that his beliefs substantiated by his action about the importance of the organization's mission has filtered down throughout the organization. It has resulted in everyone believing in and working toward one goal (PM, 2015). Fry (2003) noted that the leader's vision and actions generates a sense of calling and a feeling of membership within the organization. The PM (2015) explained that the "very collegial, trusting, caring," family like climate within his organization has engendered a sense of membership within the organization that he described as similar to a "chemical bond." This climate appears to be a result of the PM's care and concern for his people, whom he puts first (team leader, 2015) and readily interacts with (test engineer, 2015).

Fry (2003) contended that hope and faith in the organization's vision, and altruistic love together create a sense of calling and membership, which he referred to as "spiritual survival" (p. 714). These in turn produce organizational commitment and productivity within the organization

(Fry, 2003). Fry (2003) posited that if employees have a "sense of calling and membership" and belong to an organization that possesses an altruistic environment, they will want to remain with the organization (p. 714). Furthermore, Fry (2003) argued that if employees have a sense of calling and membership, and also have faith in their organization's vision, they will dedicate themselves to improve the productivity of the organization. The PM (2015) noted that his vision and the positive climate within the organization resulted in members' job satisfaction and a sense of membership. He also pointed out that this resulted in teamwork and cooperation between employees that brought the organization success and growth even in an austere fiscal environment within the government, which he noted is "almost impossible" (PM, 2015).

A comparison of Fry's (2003) theory with the PM responses highlighted that many similarities exist between the characteristics of Fry's (2003) spiritual leadership theory and the leadership experiences and views of the PM. Additionally, many of the PM's responses were corroborated with the perceptions of his subordinates that were articulated during the focus group interview. Consequently, it is posited that the PM has probably portrayed the characteristics of a spiritual leader.

PM Leadership Impacts

Despite the fact that the interview with the PM revealed his humility, the results of the thematic analysis suggested that the PM's leadership has created a positive organizational climate which has strengthened the organizational commitment and productivity of the members. On three different occasions during the interview the PM (2015) stated "I don't know if it's me; I don't think it's me." He noted that "there are a lot of things involved here" in reference to his

people's feelings of membership, their organizational commitment, and the organization's productivity (PM, 2015).

Despite his obvious reticence to take credit for all of his organization's success, during his interview the PM (2015) noted that his core values provided a foundation for his leadership, which appeared to have resulted in organizational members being inspired to work for him, and motivated to achieve the goals that were outlined by his vision. The PM's (2015) statement is supported by Bass and Avolio's (1994) supposition that value-based leadership connects leader and subordinate values. It provides a vision that invigorates member motivation, which strengthens member commitment and productivity (Bass & Avolio, 1994). The PM (2015) pointed out that the direction and boundaries provided from his vision gave his direct reports authority and empowerment to perform their jobs. Fry (2003) argued that organizational members that are empowered are more devoted to perform their assigned tasks. The PM (2015) pointed out that his trust in his organizational members provided them the freedom to be creative, which enhanced their productivity. Additionally, the PM's (2015) altruistic leadership, which was focused on member needs, resulted in an appreciative family like organizational environment that not only created a sense of job satisfaction for his organization's members but facilitated within them a "good feeling" about being in the organization. The PM's (2015) comment is supported by Fry's (2003) contention that organizations with altruistic cultures with employees that possess a "sense of calling and membership," members tend to be committed to the organization (p. 714). Fry's (2013) supposition supports the PM's assertion that his members are committed to the organization and only depart from the organization to pursue externally available growth opportunities. The PM (2015) contended that his organization "works very well together," which has facilitated the organization meeting its goals despite the austere budgetary

environment of the government. The findings from the thematic analysis suggests that the PM's leadership probably played a significant role in the members' high organizational commitment and productivity.

Limitations

This study was limited to an interview with the PM and eight of his 22 subordinates on the experiences and perceptions of the PM's leadership within the context of the spiritual leadership paradigm. Although the thematic analysis of the interview transcription data strongly supported the supposition that the PM's leadership included the display of the eight spiritual leadership characteristics, the study also suggested that the positive organizational climate within the project management organization was the result of the PM's leadership. Servant (Winston & Fields, 2015) and transformational leadership (Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016), which are also theorized to have organizational commitment as an outcome, were not examined even though theoretically they could have also been portrayed by the PM since leaders are not limited to the use of just one leadership style. Secondly, since organizational dynamics are complex, there could be other confounding factors (Cozby & Bates, 2012) besides the PM's leadership that may have also contributed to the organizational commitment and productivity that cannot be ascertained without an expansion of the scope of the study to include other areas related to the organizational dynamics of the project management office.

Recommendation for Future Research

In order to corroborate the perceptions of the PM's leadership experiences as depicted in the operational model diagrams, empirical surveys on the effects of the PM's leadership may be required with the PM's superiors, peers, and other direct reports and their subordinates that were not interviewed. The operational model diagrams provide a theoretically speculative foundation

that can be used to perform future empirical research required to validate these models and to determine if they are generalizable within not only the project management but other organizational contexts.

Conclusion

A study of the leadership of the exemplary project management office was conducted through an in-depth semi-structured interview with open ended questions. A thematic analysis was performed on the data from the interview transcript using multiple coding methods that included in vivo, descriptive, pattern, and axial coding (Saldana, 2013). The results of the first and second coding where further analyzed through a process known as "themeing the data" that identified the interview themes and their interrelationships (Saldana, 2013, p. 175), which were used to create operational model diagrams (Saldana, 2013) that depicted the PM's leadership paradigm. The results of the thematic analysis and the operational model diagrams strongly suggested that the PM portrays the characteristics of spiritual leadership espoused in Fry's (2003) theory. The results also suggested that the organizational commitment within his organization may have possibly been impacted by the PM's display of spiritual leadership characteristics. The results from this limited scope investigation appears to warrant more detailed future research to support the study's speculative conclusions and determine the possible generalizability of the operational model diagrams within different organizational contexts. Finally, the study demonstrated how a leader within a governmental context, which encourages separation of church and state, can non-compartmentally live out his faith as an example by portraying the characteristics of a spiritual leader.

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