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Spirituality and Transformational Leadership Practices: A Quantitative Study

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Abstract: Transformational leadership practices and spirituality continue to be topics of research on effective leadership. Quantitative research on the impact a leader's spiritual health has on transformational leadership practices has not been explicitly examined. This quantitative correlational research study evaluated, via self-assessment inventories, nonprofit administrators' spirituality, transformational leadership practices, and the relationship between the two. Data were gathered and tested via Person's *r* bivariate correlation to determine if a significant relationship between nonprofit administrators' spirituality, measured by the Spiritual Transformation Inventory 2.0, and transformational leadership practices, measured by the Leadership Practices Inventory, exists. Thirty-one nonprofit administrators in western Pennsylvania were selected by way of convenience sampling. The first 31 participants to return a consent form were selected. Data were collected in two weeks using online surveys. SPSS was utilized to calculate the composite (mean) scores for the spirituality and transformational leadership practices variables. The correlational coefficients were analyzed to determine significant relationships between the variables. A one-tailed test of significance was used to test the relationship of the variables with a .05 significance level to analyze the results. Data gathered and analyzed from the study provided no conclusive evidence about the relationship between western Pennsylvania nonprofit administrators' spirituality and transformational leadership practices. Continued research on spirituality and transformational leadership may offer leaders responsible for developing organizations' culture and climate a greater understanding of how to effectively nurture leadership practices for self-improvement, improvement of others, and well-being in the workplace.

Keywords: Transformational Leadership, Spiritual Health, Administration, Leadership, Higher Education

1. Introduction

The transformational leaders transcend the direct needs of employees by nurturing the leader–follower relationship and focusing on intrinsic, moral values and higher purpose to increase employee commitment and promote more meaningful work performance. [1] Research has focused primarily on the traits and behaviors of transformational leaders. [2-4] Researchers need to examine factors other than personality traits which substantially influence leaders' abilities to understand the inner self, foster meaning among followers, and support self-transcendence. [5] Although often discouraged in the workplace, spirituality should be considered as a possible factor for transformational leadership. [6]

Leaders' and followers' spirituality and innate yearning for God translate to the workplace. Spirituality in the workplace is often deterred. [6] The 21st-century workforce demands more attention be given to human elements in the workplace, and extant research on transformational leadership, spirituality, and workplace spirituality has provided the foundation to investigate the relationship between spirituality and transformational leadership practices. [7]

The problem is that it was not known if there is a relationship between leaders' spiritual health and transformational leadership practices. Whether a significant relationship exists between nonprofit administrators' spiritual health and transformational leadership practices is unknown. [8] Leaders' spirituality affects the quality of employees' lives, health, and well-being in organizations. [9] Leaders with a

healthy spiritual life lead with kindness, patience, gentleness, peace, thankfulness, joy, and love. [10]

The hope in leading others is to demonstrate an appropriate manner of communication. [3] By espousing leadership and spirituality, leaders seek an understanding of the inner self and foster meaning among followers. [5] Even though research on transformational leadership abounds, a gap in the literature is quantitative leadership research has not explicitly investigated the relationship between leaders' spiritual health and transformational leadership practices. [8] The purpose of the quantitative correlational research study was to evaluate, via self-assessment inventories, nonprofit administrators' spirituality, transformational leadership practices, and the potential relationship between the two.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Questions

The research question and hypotheses are researchable and quantifiable. To achieve the purpose of the study, the research question was written to ascertain the relationship between the variables being measured. The following research question guided the study:

Research Question: What relationship, if any, exists between a nonprofit administrator's self-assessed spirituality and self-assessed transformational leadership practices?

Hypotheses

The research question emerged from the purpose statement. The hypotheses aligned with the research question to support the purpose of the study. To achieve the purpose of the study, the following hypotheses were tested for the quantitative correlational study:

H_o: No significant relationship exists between a nonprofit administrator's self-assessed spirituality and self-assessed transformational leadership practices.

H_a: A significant relationship exists between a nonprofit administrator's self-assessed spirituality and self-assessed transformational leadership practices.

2.2. Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework was composed of two major theories. Transformational leadership and relational spirituality theory were blended to support the study. Transformational leaders are responsible for integrating holistic leadership approaches to aid in the development and transformation of employees. [11] Research indicates spiritual leadership approaches in the workplace empower leaders to improve morale, reduce stress, improve performance, and encourage employees to persevere. [12] Spiritual leaders are transcendent leaders extending transformational leadership by nurturing others' spiritual growth, feeling of belonging, purpose, and overall well-being. [5] Relating spirituality to transformational leadership practices will produce greater organizational and leadership effectiveness. [4]

The concept of *transformational leadership* was initiated by Burns and further developed by Bass into the transformational leadership theory structured into four categories: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Kouzes and Posner advanced transformational leadership theory with research to develop the five practices of exemplary leadership model: model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart. [3] As transformational leaders, nonprofit administrators are responsible to not only model the way, inspire a shared vision, motivate, and guide and direct followers but also nourish the fundamental well-being of employees to promote connections with others, spiritual development, purpose and fulfillment at work, and meaning in life. [13]

Hall and Edwards developed the Spirituality Assessment Inventory (SAI) as the relational spirituality theory paradigm was emerging. [14] As relational theories progressed, a broader spiritual development model: The Connected Life STI 2.0, a five-domain inventory consisting of connecting to self and others, connecting to God, connecting to spiritual community, connecting to spiritual practice, and connecting to God's kingdom, was developed. [13, 14]

2.2.1. Research Design Appropriateness

Quantitative research methods were used to gather and test data via Pearson's *r* bivariate correlation. The Pearson's *r* bivariate correlation was used to determine if a relationship between nonprofit organizations' administrators' spirituality, measured by the STI 2.0, and transformational leadership practices, measured by the LPI, exists. The two inventories were accessed via a secure and anonymous online survey. Data from the inventories were provided in Excel spreadsheet format for ease of transfer into SPSS.

A Pearson's *r* bivariate correlation measures the association between two continuous variables in the context of a linear relationship. [15] Correlated data measure the magnitude of change in one variable in association with the magnitude of change in another variable, and the associations of the variables are either in the same direction or in opposite directions. The Pearson's *r* bivariate coefficient measures the covariance of two continuous variables with a scale ranging from -1 to +1.

2.2.2. Participant Selection and Sampling

The target population for the study was nonprofit administrators in western Pennsylvania. The total population represented in the study is 40 western Pennsylvania nonprofit administrators. Thirty-one participants were selected based on the calculation of sample size for a Pearson's *r* in G*Power. Convenience sampling was used to ensure representation of the population. The first 31 participants to return a consent form were selected. Convenience sampling was used for participant selection.

3. Data Collection and Analysis

3.1. Surveys

The first 31 participants to return a consent form were selected.

3.1.1. STI 2.0 Online Survey

After consent for participation in the study was obtained from the first 31 participants, a personalized hyperlink was sent to access the STI 2.0 online survey. The STI 2.0 online survey was made available to the participants on October 5, 2020. Data from the STI 2.0 online survey were collected from October 5 through October 19, 2020. Notification of participants' completion of the STI 2.0 online survey indicated data were available for preparation. All participants completed 100% of the survey.

3.1.2. LPI Online Survey

The same 31 participants received an e-mail containing a personalized hyperlink to access the LPI online survey. The LPI online survey was not made available to the participants until October 11, 2020, due to the publisher's representative working on the purchase request going on vacation. The LPI online survey data were collected from October 11 through October 19, 2020. An e-mail notification was generated to indicate data were ready for collection. All participants completed 100% of the survey.

Participants were asked to complete three demographic questions concerning job title, number of years in a leadership role, and highest level of education. Three participants did not initially complete the three demographic questions. An individual e-mail was sent to each of the three participants requesting completion of the demographic questions. Two of the participants completed and returned the demographic sheet. One participant received two additional requests before returning answers to the demographic questions via e-mail.

3.2. Data Analysis and Findings

Descriptive statistical computations were performed for the STI 2.0 and LPI to include the means, standard deviations, and frequencies. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the STI 2.0 and LPI were evaluated. These processes supported the reliability of the study.

The Pearson's r bivariate correlation was used to determine if a significant relationship between nonprofit organizations' administrators' spirituality, measured by the STI 2.0, and transformational leadership practices, measured by the LPI, exists. [15] SPSS 26 was utilized to calculate the composite (mean) scores for the spirituality variable and the transformational leadership practices variable. The coefficients were analyzed to investigate if a significant relationship exists between the variables. The goal of the study was to discover if a relationship exists between the variables. A one-tailed test of significance was used to test the relationship between the variables. A .05 significance level was utilized to analyze the results.

The research question emerged from the purpose statement. The hypotheses aligned with the research question to support the purpose of the study. To achieve the purpose of the quantitative correlational study, the following research question was tested:

Research Question: What relationship, if any, exits between a nonprofit administrator's self-assessed spirituality and self-assessed transformational leadership practices?

H_o: No significant relationship exists between a nonprofit administrator's self-assessed spirituality and self-assessed transformational leadership practices.

H_a: A significant relationship exists between a nonprofit administrator's self-assessed spirituality and self-assessed transformational leadership practices.

Pearson's r bivariate correlation analyses (one-tailed) were used to address the hypotheses. The transformational leadership practices variable, the LPI composite (mean) score for the sample, was compared to the spirituality variable, the STI 2.0 composite (mean) score for the sample. Further analyses between the LPI and STI 2.0 domains were performed. The LPI domain scores for model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart were compared to the STI 2.0 domain scores for connecting to God, connecting to self and others, connecting to spiritual community, connecting to spiritual practice, and connecting to God's kingdom.

For the research question, data revealed an insignificant positive correlation ($r = .133$, $p = .238$) between nonprofit administrators' spirituality and transformational leadership practices for the research sample. No evidence was provided to reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, the null hypothesis failed to be rejected.

Further analyses of data between the LPI and STI 2.0 domains revealed a significant positive correlation (one-tailed) between the STI 2.0 domain connecting to self and others and the LPI domains of model the way ($r = .363$, $p = .022$), inspire a shared vision ($r = .382$, $p = .017$), and challenge the process ($r = .357$, $p = .024$). Another significant positive correlation (one-tailed) was found between the STI 2.0 domain of connecting to spiritual community and the LPI domain of challenge the process ($r = .388$, $p = .016$).

The data gathered and analyzed in the study provided no conclusive evidence of a relationship between western Pennsylvania nonprofit administrators' spirituality and transformational leadership practices in the study sample. The data demonstrated a moderate spirituality composite (mean) score of western Pennsylvania nonprofit administrators and supported much of the extant literature on spirituality in the workplace. The study provided additional data and insights to the body of research investigating the relationship between spirituality and transformational leadership practices.

4. Discussion

The rationale for carrying out the study was to provide nonprofit administrators with an understanding of the relationship between spirituality and transformational leadership practices. As disclosed in the literature review, uncertainty exists and no explicit extant quantitative research has examined the relationship between leaders' spiritual health and transformational leadership practices. [8] This study was directed to expand the body of literature on the relationship between nonprofit administrators' spirituality and transformational leadership practices.

The results of the study broadly paralleled the literature

discussed in the literature review. [4, 16-18] No significant relationship was revealed between western Pennsylvania nonprofit administrators' spirituality and transformational leadership practices, although significant positive correlations were found between select LPI and STI 2.0 domains. The significant positive correlations were between connecting to self and others and model the way, inspire a shared vision, and challenge the process. Another significant positive correlation was between connecting to spiritual community and challenge the process. The remaining domains demonstrated mixed and inconclusive results.

Workplace spirituality, a modern theory of practice, and relational spirituality theory were related to the development and integration of a more holistic approach to leadership, as demonstrated through Hall's The Connected Life framework. [13] The study was conducted in a theoretical framework in which transformational leadership was a variable upon which various self-assessed transformational leadership practices were measured, including model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart. Spirituality is the second variable on which various self-assessed domains were measured. The spirituality domains measured included connecting to God, connecting to self and others, connecting to spiritual community, connecting to spiritual practice, and connecting to God's kingdom, which supported the study. [13] Both transformational leadership theory and workplace spirituality/relational theory support leaders' leadership abilities to develop these specific skills. [3, 7] The findings from the study partially supported the framework concerning connecting to self and others, connecting to spiritual community, model the way, inspire a shared vision, and challenge the process aptitudes as defined by the study's online transformational leadership practices self-assessment instrument and online spiritual health self-assessment instrument. [3, 7]

The results of the study showed western Pennsylvania nonprofit administrators' spirituality to be positively correlated with some but not all transformational leadership practices and were consistent with other similar studies found in the literature. [11, 19] Mydin et al. discovered more evidence of a relationship between spirituality and transformational leadership than the present study, showing spirituality to be positively correlated with most measures of transformational leadership. [4] Iyer, in contrast, found a single relationship between spirituality and connecting with others. [20] The results of Smith et al.'s study revealed an integrated approach, including spiritual leadership and transformational leadership, motivated and inspired followers, promoting positive results. [21] The study furthermore provided information to support the notion spiritual leadership influences followers for humane outcomes. The present study refuted Göçen and Özğan's statements claiming spiritual leadership is not a legitimate theory of research and practice and spirituality in the workplace a postmodern fad. [6]

Extracted data from the data collection process revealed nonprofit administrators in the study sample to be generally more connected to self and others when modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, and challenging the process. Results of this study supported other studies that a positive relationship between spirituality and transformational leadership practices exists. [4, 11, 16, 17] The results of Smith et al.'s study revealed an integrated approach including spiritual leadership and transformational leadership motivated and inspired followers. [21] The moderately high LPI composite (mean) score may be explained by the facts collected from the demographic questionnaire. The demographic data showed most participants possessed 16 to 25 years of experience in a leadership role, and 27 of the 31 participants possessed a bachelor's degree or higher, and 16 possessed a master's degree or higher, as the highest degree of education completed. The demographic data aligned with the Bureau of Labor Statistics that administrators typically possess a minimum of a bachelor's degree. [22] The more leadership experience a leader possesses, paired with a graduate-level degree, provides the nonprofit leader with the leadership experience and education to demonstrate transformational leadership practices.

The low to moderate spirituality composite (mean) score may reflect the lack of a robust personal spirituality of western Pennsylvania nonprofit administrators in the sample. If the study were conducted in the Bible Belt, a densely populated area where Christian Evangelical Protestantism is dominant, the spirituality composite (mean) score may have been much higher. In turn, without inferring causation, the relationship between spirituality and transformational leadership practices of nonprofit administrators may have reflected a significant relationship. [10]

5. Conclusion

The results and implications of the study contributed to the body of research investigating the relationship between spirituality and transformational leadership practices. Because organizational leaders are constantly seeking more effective leadership practices, further investigation on the relationship between spirituality and transformational leadership practices was recommended. Recommendations were offered for future researchers interested in contributing to the body of literature on the relationship between spirituality and transformational leadership. An increased understanding of the relationship between spirituality and transformational leadership has implications for nonprofit administrators eager to lead more effectively through self-improvement, improvement of others, and well-being in the workplace.

The sample of western Pennsylvania nonprofit administrators in the study revealed no significant relationship between spirituality and transformational leadership practices. Significant positive correlations, although weak and providing limited evidence of a relationship, were found between the spiritual domain of connecting to self and others and the following transformational leadership domains of model the way, inspire a shared vision, and challenge the process. Another significantly positive correlation, although weak and providing limited evidence of a relationship,

was found between the spiritual domain of connecting to spiritual community and the transformational leadership domain of challenge the process. The results of many of the studies discussed in the literature review were consistent with the inconclusive results of this study.

The convenience sample consisted of 31 nonprofit administrators. A larger sample size and different selection criteria may have yielded more generalizable findings and statistical significance. The disproportionate response rates of nonprofit administrators from each of the 20 counties in western Pennsylvania may have limited the study.

The research study was limited to the ability to measure nonprofit administrators' spirituality and transformational leadership to one method each. Multiple methods of measuring spiritual health and workplace spirituality, including employees' health, well-being, purpose and fulfillment at work, and meaning in life, and other methods to appraise transformational leadership were reviewed in the crafting of the literature review but were not operative in the study due to time and financial constraints.

Future researchers should consider the implications of personal organizational position, especially if the study will be conducted in the organization with which a researcher is affiliated. The risk of potential data misuse and the sense of compulsory participation should be mitigated. Future researchers should ensure the recruitment of an appropriate sample size due to possible participant attrition.

As a final point, future researchers should consider using other research methodologies to investigate the relationship between spirituality and transformational leadership. The study exclusively used quantitative methodologies. The inclusion of qualitative data may provide information and data not included in the self-evaluation of spirituality and self-evaluation of transformational leadership practices inventories. Interview or survey data collected qualitatively may offer further insight into nonprofit administrators' spirituality and transformational leadership practices.

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