



# The role of servant leadership and spirituality in promoting efficiency and productivity in the workplace

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## Abstract

The principal aim of this paper was to examine the role of servant leadership and spirituality in promoting efficiency and productivity in a workplace environment. This paper fully discusses the early theories of efficiency and productivity to show how the classical theories overtly and covertly omitted the aspect of servant leadership and spirituality in their analysis. This paper shows clearly that the understanding of those two elements, namely: servant and spiritual leadership in the life of the CEO and his subordinate (employees) are essential in promoting efficiency in a workplace environment. In the same vein, the paper discusses how the life of Moses in the Bible as both a servant and a spiritual leader of the Israelites whom he was able to control was an example of the notion of servant leadership. This paper finally recommends to CEOs in various organizations to emulate the life of Moses in the Bible if they are to promote efficiency and productivity in their various workplace environment.

**Keywords:** Servant leadership, spirituality, promoting efficiency and productivity, workplace.

## Introduction

In academic circles, one valuable idea in leadership studies that has its roots in the Bible is that of servant leadership (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). Greenleaf (1970) is of the view that servant leaders are not concerned with personal aggrandizement and self-interest. Servant leaders' focus on others, thus, they care about people, empower others and are often considered as facilitators who expect their followers or subordinates to be successful (Greenleaf, 1978; Greenleaf, 1977; Nicolaides & Duho, 2019). In a research work conducted by Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) on servant leadership, they found "strong relationship with positive outcomes such as employees' extra effort, employee's satisfaction and perception of organizational effectiveness. The work of Hayden (2011) on leadership also confirmed that servant leadership has positive effects on followers.

Russel and Stone (2002) in their research work on servant leadership argued that there are twenty (20) attributes of servant leadership and nine (9) of these attributes are classified as functional while eleven (11) are regarded as a accompany attributes. The nine (9) attributes are: Vision, honesty, integrity, trust, modelling, pioneering, appreciation of others and empowerment. The eleven accompany attributes are: communication, credibility, competence, stewardship, visibility, influence, encouragement, persuasion, listening, teaching and delegation.



The above attributes have given us the insight of what is expected of a servant leadership and it is also seen as the building block of a servant leadership. All the above attributes have positive effects on followers and according to Hayden (2011), the strongest effect is around good health and it is in view of this that Hayden argues that organizations headed by servant leaders will create an environment where followers feel very healthy. This premises also supports the view that leadership is a process and not a position and that the three (3) essential elements of leadership are- (a) the leader itself, (b) the followers and (c) the environment in which the leader operates.

Having briefly discussed the general view of leadership, we will now examine the concept of spiritual leadership which ensures that there will be spirituality in the workplace. Workplace spirituality has been defined as:

“A framework of organization values evidenced in the culture that promotes employees experience of transcendence through the work process, facilitating their sense of being connected in a way that provides feelings of compassion and joy” (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003:13; 2003a). In today’s world, it is hard for many of us to separate our work from the rest of our being. We spend too much of our time at work or in work related social and leisure activities for us to expect to continue trying to compartmentalize our lives into separate work, family, religions and social domain. There is a pressure many of us feel to recognize and respond to the sacred in us which must find place in the secular workplace. It has been argued that if personal or social transformation is to take place, it is most likely to take place at work (Fairholm, 1996). Life in general is about spirit and we humans carry one spirit that manifest in both life and livelihood.

### **Spiritual Leadership in Organizations**

The issue of spiritual leadership in organizations is now drawing attention from the members of the public. The current movement towards spiritualizing organizations is now acknowledged as the wave of the future. Today business leaders are now searching for an anchor to help provide stability in the workplace (Bailey, 1998). We now have many diverse firms and moving ahead to instill a spiritual approach to their corporate cultures: Tom’s of Maine, Herman Miller, TD Industries, Lancaster Laboratories, Wetherilli Associates, Toro Company, Sisters of St. Joseph Health System, Medtronic, Townsend and Bottum, Shnieder Engineering Corporation, Bank of Montreal, (See Wagner-Marsh & Conley, 1999: 292; Nicolaidis, 2018).

Recent literature is now advocating for a new age of spiritual awareness to be considered in workplace environment. Those who claim to be rational management gurus have made a mess and dysfunction of many companies. Some individuals argue that the deregulation of employment- the abandonment of the traditional physiological contract connecting workers to a destroyed life-long career with company has effectively destroyed the security and tranquility of the workplace. There is a general belief among people that what is needed today to repair the lost human aspect is the application of spirituality. We as human beings must not forget that there is a part of us that is not just physical, a part of that we are comfortable in calling spirit, which unbelievers call human nature. This is the vital, energizing force in human beings and it influences and affects one’s identity, values and our sense of responsibility and accountability. It is the driving force in creating relationship and wisdom for individuals. It is also argued that people are hungry for this kind of meaning in their lives. They often try to integrate their spiritual selves with their



profession or work. Herman (1995) is also of the view that humanity belongs within the greater scheme of things and how harmony can be realized in life. Fairholm (1996) is of the view that without taking anything away from religious doctrines, the new focus or workplace spirituality is one way to apply spiritual beliefs and satisfy the need to feel the spirit through work. This shows we can nourish the spirit in widely diverse ways including leadership (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003, 2004).

In a broader perspective, spirituality implies a relationship with something intangible beyond the self. It is a guide and a pointer for personal values and meaning, a way of understanding self and the world and is a means of personal and group integration and it is in group dynamics and integration that spirituality has place in work environment (Etzioni, 2015). The understanding of spiritual leadership helps us to develop a model that reject the values of self-interest, power wealth and prestige. It helps us to focus on a model that promote ethical values like integrity, independence and justice. It also classifies follower's moral identities and strengthen individual commitments. Spiritual leaders make connections between other's interior worlds of moral reflection and the outer worlds of work and social relationships.

## **Theoretical Framework and Literature Review**

### **The Theories of Productivity and Efficiency in Organizations:**

The theoretical underpinning to be considered in this paper includes classical theory of how to increase productivity by, Adam Smith in his division of labour theory, Frederic W. Taylor's, theory of scientific management, the human relations approach by Elton Mayo and the theory of bureaucracy. Adam Smith in the work of Kroos and Gilbert (1911) showed that the management of these organizations in respect of the production system was chaotic and that there is a need for division of labour if the production is to be increased. He experimented with the production of pins where division of labour must occur and this eventually led to increase in the production. This idea helped to systematize the production process. Most organizational tasks were subdivided and performed by specialized labour. However, poor coordination caused frequent problems and break downs of the manufacturing process.

This systematic management approach attempted to build specific procedures and processes into operations to ensure coordination of effort. The bone of contention here is economical operations, adequate staffing, maintenance of inventories was achieved through:

- Careful definition of duties and responsibilities.
- Standardized techniques for performing these duties
- Specific means of gathering, handling, transmitting, and analyzing information
- Ensured production control systems to help internal coordination and communication.

The emphasis in this school of thought revolves around internal operations mainly because managers were concerned on how to meet the explosive growth in demand was directly brought about by industrial revolution (Kroos and Gilbert, 1911). At this point in time, managers are free to focus and examine internal issues, partly because of the government did not constrain business practices significantly. It should also be noted that labour union activities were not well organized. This resulted in managers focusing on efficiency and productivity and not on the well-being or the



influence of individual spirituality on their performance values. This systematic management failed to address all the issues 19<sup>th</sup> century managers failed. It only created awareness in respect of the most pressing problem on how to promote efficiency.

The failure of this systematic management led to the birth of the scientific management approach by Frederick Taylor in 1878. Taylor quickly observed that production and pay were poor, inefficiency and waste were common, and most industries led tremendous unused potential. In view of this, Taylor introduced the scientific management approach where he advocated the application of scientific management to analyze work and to determine how to complete production task efficiently (Hebeisen, 1999).

Taylor identified four principles of scientific management:

- a) Management should develop a precise, scientific approach for each element of one's work replace' general guidelines.
- b) Management should scientifically select, train, teach, and develop each other worker so that the right person has the right jobs.
- c) Management should cooperate with workers to workers to ensure that jobs match plans and principles.
- d) Management should ensure appropriate division of work and responsibility between managers and workers.

To implement this approach, Taylor used techniques such as time-and-motion studies. With this technique, a task was divided into its basic movements and different motions were timed to determine the most efficient way to complete the task. In addition to this, Taylor stressed the importance of hiring and training the proper worker to that job. Taylor also directly advocated for the standardization of tools, the use of instruction cards to help workers and break time to eliminate fatigue (Aitken, 1985). Taylor also promoted the idea of a pay system whereby workers were paid additional wages when they exceeded a standard level of output for each job. He concluded that both workers and management would benefit from such an approach and emphasized the need for cooperation between management and workers (Aitken, 1985).

Unfortunately, many people including trade unions were not so impressed with Taylorism, mainly because, he was treating employees as machine and not as social beings partly because trade unions believed management might abuse their power to set standards and the piece rates, thus exploiting workers and diminishing their importance (Waring, 1991). Furthermore, this approach did not help managers deal with broader external issues such as competitors and government regulations. The failure of the scientific management to achieve the goals of efficiency in the production system gave rise to administrative management approach.

The administrative management approach deals with squarely on the perspective of senior managers within the organization and buttressed the fact that management should be seen as a profession and could be taught. This idea was given much publicity by Henri Fayol in 1916 where he identified five functions and 14 principles of management. The five functions include the following (a) planning, (b) organizing, (c) commanding and (e) controlling. Fayol's 14 principles of management include the following; (1) Division of work, (2) Authority, (3) Discipline, (4) Unity of command, (5) Unity of direction, (6) Subordination of individuals, (7) Remuneration, (8)



Centralization, (9) Scalar chain, (10) Order, (11) Equity, (12) Stability and tenure of personnel, (13) Initiative, (14) Esprit de corps). However, this perspective has been criticized claiming Fayol treated the above principles as universal truths for management and they may not work in all settings. Different types of personnel, industry conditions and technologies may affect the appropriateness of those principles.

The fourth approach to be considered in this paper is the human relations approach which was developed in the early 1930s. This approach aimed at understanding how psychological and how social processes interact the work situation to influence performance and productivity. This approach was the first major approach to emphasize informal work relationships and worker satisfaction (Kyle, 2006). This human relations approach emerged from the famous studies undertaken at Western Electric Hawthorne Plant, under the direction of Elton Mayo and Fritz Roethlisberger. They were to investigate the influence of physical working conditions on workers' productivity and efficiency. This study is not only important for the breakthrough which they realized in the analysis of industrial organizations; the various phases of this long research summarize and illustrate in a clear way the successive stages through which the empirical study of man at work has passed.

The chief aim of the Hawthorne research was to examine working conditions as they are related to output and generally to classify the numerous problems in the working situation. The investigators in this research wanted to relate the workers' performance to such variables as illumination, fatigue and so on. In their methodology they try to imitate the exact sciences. The test room method consists of the variation of an independent variable (e.g. illumination) and the examination of its impact on the dependent variable (output), all other relevant variables being kept constant.

Unfortunately, the results of these experiments are inconclusive and confusing and the investigators after two years of research, turn their attention to the psychological factors and socio-psychological factors determining organizational behavior. They gradually realize that such variables as illumination, or humidity cannot be treated separately from the meaning which individuals assign to them, their attitude towards them and their preoccupations about them. As a consequence of this realization, the methodology changes. The search for casual variables in the physical environment is replaced by the interview as a suitable tool for the exploration of complex situation in which one must consider not only external facts but also attitudes towards and feelings about those facts. By interviewing employees on a plant-wide basis, the research team tries firstly to explore their morale, their satisfactions and dissatisfactions in their job and the organization and secondly to explore these attitudes by means of the interviewee's personal history and background.

During these massive interviews, the investigators realize that one must search for the explanation of workers' attitude and behavior, not so much in their personality characteristics, socially acquired in the past and outside the plant, but rather in the social organization inside the plant. The focus here shifts, and the determinants of working behavior are sought in the structure and culture of the group, which is spontaneously formed by the interactions of individuals working together (Mouzelis, 1975). In this perspective, the worker is not any longer perceived as an isolated psychological being but as a group norms and values. This approach becomes more sociological and the researchers realize the complexity of the situation and the arbitrariness of taking an individual outside his real social situation to interview him.



This shift of focus from physiological and psychological to socio-psychological and finally to sociological variable demonstrates the general trend of empirical research in studying and understanding industrial organizations during the past decades. In these past studies, the researchers never considered the issue of the issues of spirituality and servant leadership in promoting efficiency and productivity in organizations.

The last theoretical issues to be considered is theory of bureaucracy by Max Weber. Max Weber was a German sociologist, lawyer, and social historian who showed clearly how management itself could be more efficient and consistent in his book- "The Theory of Social and Economic Organizations", the ideal model for management, according to Weber is the bureaucracy approach (Weber, 1974). Max Weber believed bureaucratic structures can eliminate the variability that results when managers in the same organization have different skills, experiences and goals. Weber advocated that the jobs themselves be standardized so that personnel changes would not disrupt the organization. He emphasized a structured, formal network of relationships among specialized positions in an organization (Swedberg, 1998; Weber, 1974).

Rules and regulations standardize behavior, and authority resides in positions rather than individuals (Girodo, 1998). As a result, the organization need not to rely on one individual but will realize efficiency and success by following the rules in a routine and unbiased manner. Weber is also of the opinion that bureaucracies are especially important because they allow large organizations to perform the many routine activities necessary for their survival. Bureaucracy can lead to efficiency and high productivity according to Weber. However, Weber's arguments have been criticized on many grounds. In the first place, we have observed that too much authority may be invested in few people; the procedures may become the ends rather than the means; or managers may ignore appropriate rules and regulations. In addition to this, some people may not perform their best with the excessive bureaucratic rules and procedure.

### **A Critique of the Above Theories**

All the above theories discussed have their own shortcomings which stem from viewing human ability to perform from structural perspectives by paying particular attention on the tools to work, the rules and regulations guiding industrial behavior, the influence of formal and informal groups in the organizations, the human relations aspect of the manager and his subordinates and the scientific methodology used in increasing productivity and efficiency in the production system. All the classical theories conspicuously omitted the spiritual aspects of the individual that can influence the behavior of an individual in any given situation. We must not forget the there is a part of us that is not just physical, a part that we are proud to call spiritual which some people may refer to as human nature especially among unbelievers. This spiritual aspect is vital and the energizing force in human being (Kurth, 2003). This is one of the major driving forces in creating relationship and wisdom for individual performance in creating relationship in organizations. Herman (1995) argues that this spiritual aspect of individuals often make effort to integrate their spiritual selves with their professional work and that humanity belongs within the greater scheme of things and how harmony in the workplace and our homes can be realized in life.

Fairholm (1996) argues that the spiritual aspects of human beings are the main guide and pointer for personal values which helps the individual or group of individuals in understanding the



dynamics of the workplace environment. This also confirms that we can nourish the spirit in widely diverse ways including leadership in organization. The spirituality in leadership role has been found in recent time to promote ethical values like integrity and individual commitments, thus promoting cooperation and productivity. Unfortunately, the classical theorists on productivity and efficiency in organizations, covertly and overtly omitted these aspects in their early analysis on productivity and efficiency in organizations. An attempt-will now be made to discuss and analyze the role of servant leadership and spirituality in promoting efficiency and productivity in the workplace environment.

## **Discussion and Analysis**

Churches have been classified as a normative organization where an individual and group behavior are guided by norms (Etzioni, 1990). This is a situation where you must obey the doctrine (norms) as given by God and delivered his children through spiritual leaders who can influence others. The inference we can draw from this is that leadership is influence. This buttressed the fact that if you are called to influence others. Jesus said it is this way: “You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world... Let your light so shine before men, that may see your good works and glorify your father in heaven” (Matthew 5: 13-16).

The above quotation indicates to us that it does not matter whether you are the CEO of a company or the pastor of a church; if you call yourself a Christian, then you are called to influence others.

## **Moses as a Servant Leader and a Lesson for the CEO’s of Companies**

Moses is often regarded as one of the greatest biblical leaders in the Old Testament. He is praised as being a “Servant of God” (Deuteronomy 34:5). As a servant of God, he cared more for the people than for himself (Garfinkel, 2004). He was not jealous of anyone and declared (Numbers 11:21): “are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would put his upon them.” Moses would have been quite satisfied had all the Israelites become prophets and God communicated with them, even if this meant that he was no longer needed. His early life experience shows that when he became an adult and left the palace (Exodus 2:11) “And it came to pass, after Moses had grown up, he went out to his brethren and looked on their labour, he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brethren”. Moses had a difficult choice make. According to Lynch and Friedman, (2013), “should he ignore his brethren and remain a prince of Egypt or should he join the slaves and give up everything?” During this time, Moses was 20 years old when he went out to see his brethren. He observed the heavy duty they had to do and lamented. He tried to help them with their burdens. God was very impressed with Moses and the fact that he cast aside his royal position to share the sorrow of Israel and treat them like a brother.

Undoubtedly, this characteristic of Moses defines the ultimate servant leader. This was a leader who overtly felt the pain of his subordinates when they had to work too hard. Moses was a leader who identified with his people and tried to reduce their burdens. This is empathy which is expected from a true leader. Moses gave up his privileged life as a prince of Egypt because of the harsh treatment of the Hebrew slaves (Exodus 1-3). He fled Egypt after killing an Egyptian taskmaster for viciously beating one of the slaves. He left and abandoned the position of a royal prince to a lowly Midianite shepherd. Moses clearly showed that he was deeply concerned with justice. The



Bible (Exodus 2: 11-17) stipulates three different stories about him when he became an adult. In the first place, he killed an Egyptian taskmaster who was striking a Hebrew slave. The next day he got involved when he saw two Hebrew slaves fighting each other. When he fled Egypt and found himself in Midian, he interceded when he saw Midianite shepherds trying to steal water drawn by Jethro's daughters for their father's sheep. The Bible shows that Moses would not stand by when any injustice was being committed. His sense of justice was not only for his own people, the Hebrews. He was outraged by any injustice, even wrongs committed against stranger's women. During the ancient times women were not treated well, but Moses, a fugitive from Egypt, stuck his life to help Midianite women, thus seeking for justice and recognition for the female sex (Lynch & Friedman, 2013)

Moses as a leader was concerned about wrongs committed to strangers especially in work workplace. He had no problem standing up to God when he felt that injustice had been committed. The first time Moses spoke to pharaoh and asked him to let the people go to hold a feast in the wilderness, Pharaoh responded harshly (Exodus 5: 1-15). The slaves were told that the quota of bricks that they had to produce remained the same but that they had to find the straw; no one would bring straw to the slaves; they would have to go gather straw for themselves. Moses did not understand what God was doing and lashed out saying (Exodus 5: 22): "My Lord why have you harmed these people? Why have you sent me? This is the way one expects a servant leader to speak when his flock is hurting.

Moses' leadership of the Hebrews, is revealed in all its facets as the book of Deuteronomy which was purportedly written by him. In fact 167 chapters of the Pentateuch, also known as the Torah, deal mainly with the story of Moses life. "Everything the Torah tells us about Moses is a lesson in Jewish leadership...the circumstances of Moses' birth are a lesson in the selflessness demanded of the leader"(Chabad.org, 2015)and the sacrifices required by those closest to him. The Orthodox Jews refer to him as Moshe Rabbenu, `EvedHaShem, AvihaNeviimzya'a, and he is defined as "Our Leader Moshe", "Servant of God", and "Father of all the Prophets". (Jansen van Rensburg & Nicolaides, 2015)

In addition to this, a careful understanding of Moses's general behavior, reveals that he was much more than empathetic; he fully identified very strong with his people even when they made serious mistakes in their endeavors. For example, after the incident of the golden calf, God was ready to destroy the Israelites. Moses stood up to God and demand (Exodus 32:32) that God should forgive sin-but then blot me out of the book you have written. The inference we can draw from this premises is that Moses was telling God to remove him from the book of life, i.e. kill him, if he did not forgive the people for the sin of the Golden Calf. This is what a true servant leadership is all about: a great love follower so that one is willing to die for them. However, we do not expect CEO's of companies to be willing to die for employees in their workplace, but they should have this kind of passion and attitude.

Another example in the Bible where Moses demonstrated a true servant leadership was when the Israelites made another serious mistake in the false report of the spies (Numbers 13-14). God made a very tempting offer to Moses (Numbers 14:12): "I will smite them with pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of a greater Nation and mightier than they." Moses, as a true servant leader, refused to be enticed to abandon his flock with any offer, no matter how good.





Moses was authoritarian when he needed to be, decisive at times and also very supportive and compassionate towards his people. The definition of Moses as a leader in literature is that he is referred to as a person whose followers remained mostly loyal to him and did so willingly, out of an appreciation of both his power and his charismatic nature. Also important to note is that Moses as a leader, was not coerced to assume the role which further endeared him to his followers” (Jansen van Rensburg & Nicolaides, 2015).

As far Moses is concerned, his people come first. In today’s work environment can the CEO’s consider the interest of their employees’ first as Moses did to his flock or his followers? Furthermore, Moses was humble, and God pleaded with him to take up the position of leadership (Exodus 3:7-4:17). Moses used five different arguments with God as to why he should not be the one to go to Pharaoh and lead the Hebrew slaves out of Egypt. His great humanity is seen in the Bible (Numbers 12:3) which explicitly states: “Now Moses was a humble man, humbler than anyone in the face of the earth.” Moses did not use his position of power to enrich himself. His hands were clean and was able to say to God (Numbers 16:15) “I have not even taken a single donkey of theirs, nor have I wronged even one of them.”

Can CEO’s in their respective environments adopt this honesty, integrity and trust in Moses’s characteristics? Undoubtedly, if they do, then they will be covertly and overtly promoting efficiency and productivity in their respective workplace environment (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Etzioni, 2015). In the same vein, this will minimize the endemic conflicts between employer and employees in work environment. This will create a harmonious, peaceful, and a cordial relationship between labour and capital in workplace. In addition to this, it will also be a supporting pillar to all the classical and contemporary theories of promoting efficiency and productivity we have earlier discussed in this paper.

### **Concluding Remarks**

From the above discussion, it can now be argued that servant leadership is a valuable approach in promoting efficiency and productivity in the workplace environment. In addition to this spiritual component as we saw it in the case of Moses, it will go a long way in building that trust between employer and his employees. In the Bible, (1 Kings 3), king Solomon also offer a lesson for all leaders. God appeared to King Solomon in a dream and offered him anything that he wanted. Rather than asking for wealth, power, or long life, Solomon asked for the following: “Give therefore your servant understanding heart to judge your people, that I may be able to discern good and bad. For who is able to judge these great people of yours?” Solomon understands what a leader needs to be successful: Wisdom, a passion for the justice, and concern for people.

In same perspective, Psalmist (Psalms 15) describes some of the attributes of a victorious individual. These attributes are just as important for leaders and organizations: “one who walks in total integrity, deals righteously and speaks the truth from his or her heart”. “One who has no slander on his tongue, who has done his fellow human no evil nor cast disgrace upon his close one...Whoever does these things shall falter.” The spiritual servant leader does no harm to his fellow human and he is fair in dealing with others. The element of fairness must be considered by both employees and employers when dealing with each other and this will help in building a good



relationship between them, thus increasing the elements of trust and commitments which eventually lead to efficiency and productivity in the workplace environment.

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