



ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT FOR ENTRENCHING TRANSCENDENTAL LEADERSHIP MODEL TO ADDRESS THE CHARACTER PROBLEMATIC IN LEADERSHIP IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the role of the learning and social organizational contexts in entrenching spiritual leadership tenets in organizations in Africa as a way of addressing the character problems in leadership. The paper is an empirical review paper, which identified spiritual leadership as a transcendental leadership model that incorporates character in leadership proposed that to entrench spiritual leadership in African based organizations, the learning and social organizational contexts have to be conducive. We therefore recommend that leaders of African based organizations should adopt transcendental leadership model of spiritual leadership to lead with character; and the learning and social organizational contexts should be strengthened to help organizational members unlearn unethical practices, learn value driven principles in the conduct of their businesses and facilitate character driven organizational culture through a shared vision.

Keywords: Spiritual Leadership, Learning Context, Social Context, Transcendental leadership.

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INTRODUCTION

The deficit in character in the leadership of a number of African nations and African based organizations have been a subject of concern for a long time. The character of a number of leaders in both private and public institutions have been called to question with much of the continent's developmental challenges being attributed to leadership failure at various levels. The lack of values on the path of the leaders has had grave consequences for both governments and business ventures globally and a solution seems farfetched. Several leadership theories and styles have emerged over time with little success in addressing the challenge of unethical practices in leadership. But, according to Mehta and Joshi (2010, p. 221), "a major transformation is witnessed in the organizations of today with an emerging movement to bring spiritual and ethical values into business". Consequently, in recent times, a transcendental leadership model has emerged in management theorizing to fill an obvious gap in literature. This transcendental leadership model known as spiritual leadership, incorporate such related leadership styles as moral leadership, benevolent leadership and ethical leadership (Wang, Guo, Ni, Shang & Tang, 2019) and appears to provide the missing link between leadership and character. Kuhnert and Lewis (1987) state that "spiritual leadership theory comprises ethical aspects (e.g., ethical consideration, integrity, and trust) (Wang et al., 2019, p. 2).

The predictive effect of the dimensions of spiritual leadership on organizational outcomes has well been established. For instance, Ahaiuzu and Asawo (2009, 2010, 2012) established strong positive relationships between the dimensions of spiritual leadership and workers' commitment in the Nigerian Manufacturing Industry; Bodla, Ali and Danish (2013) identified a positive association between spiritual leadership and employee performance; just as Wang et al. (2019) established a positive link between spiritual leadership and organizational effectiveness. In the light of the empirically verifiable evidence of the importance of spiritual leadership to organizational outcomes, there is the need to seek ways of entrenching spiritual leadership in African based organizations. The purpose of this study is therefore to undertake an empirical review on the role of the learning and social organizational contexts in entrenching spiritual leadership tenets in organizations in Africa as a way of addressing the character problematic in leadership.

Conceptual Clarification of Spiritual Leadership

Oliveira (2002, p. 1) argues that "in recent years, the place of spirituality in organizations has been increasingly considered by (a) managers, (b) executives, (c) employees, and (d) researchers to be essential to the organization's interactions with employees, customers, and the community". An important feature of spiritual leadership that makes it stand out in addressing the issue of character in leadership is succinctly captured by Fairholm (1996) who argues that unlike previous models of leadership which focus on values of self-interest, energized by implicit values focusing on power, wealth and prestige, spiritual leadership is centered on transcendent values of leaders, which include a rejection of self-interest values. This argument is supported by the position of Bodla et al. (2013, p. 117) that "spiritual leadership focuses on values of altruistic love to be incorporated in organization's culture" which manifests in leader's attitude and behaviors in the expression of altruistic love towards their employees which in return provide a sense of membership.

Spiritual leadership is a leadership model that emphasizes intrinsically motivating one's self and others through the leader's values, attitudes, and behaviors (Wang et al., 2019). Fry (2003, pp. 694-695) states that spiritual leadership comprises "the values, attitudes, and behaviours that are necessary to intrinsically motivate one's self and others so that they have a sense of spiritual survival through calling and membership", and Fry (2005) clarifies the leadership perspective of spiritual leadership theory by arguing that it:

entails motivating followers by creating a vision of a long-term challenging, desirable, compelling and different future. When combined with a sense of mission of whom we are and what we do, this vision establishes the foundation for the organization's culture with its fundamental ethical system and core values. The ethical system subsequently establishes a moral imperative for right and wrong behaviour which, when combined with organizational goals and strategies, acts as a substitute ... for the traditional bureaucratic structure (centralization, standardization and formalization).

The three generally accepted dimensions of spiritual leadership are vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love. According to Wang et al. (2019, p. 2):

Vision refers to a meaningful future, causing employees to feel intrinsic self-value and life purpose. Hope/faith reflects the leader's confidence in the achievability of the vision, high levels of which can inspire subordinates to accomplish the organizational mission. Altruistic love exhibits a series of leader behaviors valuing mutual care and respect and producing a sense of being understood and appreciated by organizational members, based on which a favorable organizational culture is likely to be forged.

The association of spiritual leadership, to organizational outcomes is gaining wide spread research attention as stated earlier and it is now time to extend the frontiers of research to the contextual issues that may facilitate or impede its entrenchment in organizations.

Empirical Review

The Role of the Learning Context in the entrenchment of Spiritual Leadership

The learning context of the organization is typified by the state of organizational learning. Pedler et al. (1988, 1989, 1991) defines a learning organization as "one which facilitates the learning of all its members, and which continuously transforms itself" (Stewart 1996 p. 78; Armstrong 2000, p. 225; Hughes 2000, p. 4; Othman & Hashim 2003 p. 3). Similarly Senge (1990 p.3) gave a more comprehensive definition of the learning organization in which he stated that it is one:

Where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people continually learn to learn together.

Stewart (1996) is of the view that there are similarities between the definition of Pedler et al. (1991) and Senge (1990) as both emphasize continuous learning as well as the importance of collective goals.

The broad premise of this new movement, according to Buchanan (2000), is that an organization which lacks the capabilities for acquiring and utilizing existing knowledge, and for sourcing fresh insights, is likely to face extinction in the competitive economy. Consequently, the learning organization creates a clear vision about the future and through a coherent action plan of steady transformation, moves towards the envisioned business position. In this regard, organizational learning is conceived of as a principal means of achieving the strategic renewal of the organization (Crossan, 1999). At the heart of the learning organization, according to Cole (2002) is the need for greater collaboration in problem/opportunity perception and its solution/exploitation. The resultant effect of such collaborative effort is usually greater than it would have been if events were unconnected.

Consequently, every individual member of the organization is required to engage in healthy exchanges that create new and alternative ways of undertaking their jobs and committing themselves to working together to achieve results more effectively. This orientation to work is encapsulated in the philosophy of the learning organization and Cole (2002, p. 326) iterates that it “is to enhance the achievement of collective goals by harnessing the reservoir of knowledge, skills and insights of all members of the organization”. In this regard, Friedman et al. (2001) define organizational learning as a process of inquiry that enables organizational members to develop shared values and knowledge. The learning organization is invariably a guiding vision for reaching out, rather than an attainable state (Snell, 2002).

In this regard, Holmqvist (1993, p. 3) draws attention to Weick and Westley’s (1996) assertion that,

learning is not an inherent property of an individual or of an organization, but rather resides in the quality and nature of the relationship between levels of consciousness within the individual, between individuals, and between the organization and the environment.

This situation links the individual world of the worker with the world of the organization. Smith (2001) and Kinjerski and Skrypnek (2006) argue that one of the ways organizations create conditions for spirit at work is through the provision of opportunities for continuous learning. As posited by Rego, Cunha and Souto (2006, p. 9) “employees tend to be more affectively and normatively committed, and less instrumentally bonded to their organization, if they feel that ...opportunities to learning and personal development exist...”

The empirical review shows that the learning context has direct and distinct implications for spiritual leadership entrenchment. It further shows that the learning context is an important contextual variable within the organization for supporting the practice of spiritual leadership. Several authors as we have noted (Stewart 1996; Armstrong 2000; Hughes 2000; Othman & Hashim, 2003) have projected Pedler et al.’s (1988, 1989, 1991) postulation that a learning organization is one in which learning of all organizational members is facilitated and that such an organization continuously transforms itself. Thus, a conducive learning context promotes organizational transformation, which spiritual leadership represents. Asawo (2009) found that the

learning context is positively associated with spiritual leadership, indicating that spiritual leadership practices are likely to be enhanced where organizational members learn to learn and grow together. It is therefore our argument that the learning organizational context cannot be ignored when implementing a model of transformation such as spiritual leadership or when seeking for agents of transformation that will enhance organizational change.

It has become clear that organizational learning remains critical for organizational success since an organization, which lacks the capabilities for acquiring and utilizing existing knowledge, and for sourcing fresh insights, according to Buchanan (2000) is likely to face extinction in the competitive economy. Consequently, the importance of organizational learning, which enhances corporate vision through a coherent action plan of steady transformation, should not be diminished because it remains a principal means of achieving the strategic renewal of the organization (Crossan, 1999).

Consequently, organizational members of manufacturing organizations are still required to engage in healthy exchanges that create new and alternative ways of undertaking their jobs and committing themselves to working together to accomplish results more effectively. This orientation to work, which we have identified to be encapsulated in the philosophy of the learning organization ensures goal attainment. For, Cole (2002, p. 326) iterates that organizational learning “is to enhance the achievement of collective goals by harnessing the reservoir of knowledge, skills and insights of all members of the organization”. The position of Friedman et al. (2001) that organizational learning is a process of inquiry that enables organizational members to develop shared values and knowledge buttresses the view of Snell (2002) that it provides a guiding vision for reaching out, and confirms our position that it has a direct and not a mediating influence.

The role of the Social Context in the entrenchment of Spiritual Leadership in African Organizations

The social context of the organization is typified in the social capital within the organization. Putnam (1993) who is acknowledged to have popularized the concept of social capital (Ponthieux, 2004) posits that it “refers to features of social organization such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (Putnam 1993, p.35). It emanates from the idea that relationships constitute a major resource just as other forms of capital within the organization (Larsen *et al.*, 2004). Social capital is thus viewed as the stock of formal or informal social networks that individuals use to allocate goods and services (Rose 1998). It is an outcome of the institutionalization of social relationships in social structure (Pantoja 1999).

These social relationships are both formal and informal as identified by Rose (1998), and generally concern economic returns from networks of social relationships (Pargal, Huq & Gilligan, 1999). Extending this view, Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993) argue that social capital is constituted by certain expectations for action within a collectivity that affect the economic goals and goal-seeking behaviour of its members. From the foregoing, it can be adduced that social capital emphasizes the role of social networks in the achievement of organizational goals. The networks according to Nahapiet and Goshak (1998) enhance access to, and exchange of information, enforcement of contracts and focusing on a shared vision and collective goals. We argue that man’s social associations impact his work life which is likely to be improved when the work is socially structured.

Social capital, it can be argued, emphasize civic engagement and shape the attitudes of organizational members. This however happens over a certain period from when the individual first comes into the organization as a member. Within this period, and through the process of socialization and integration, the individual's cognitive, emotive and spiritual maps are aligned to the larger social organizational context. Lawler, Mohrman and Ledford (1998) therefore posit that organizations may increasingly realize that they have to do a good job of balancing the organizations needs for cost competitiveness and performance with the development of satisfying work relationships that can attract and hold individuals who are the source of competitive advantage. Thus membership and calling which gives rise to workers' commitment can best be attained when social exchange within the organization is unhindered. Konz and Ryan (1999) made this point by arguing that the spirituality of the organization's leaders maintains the spirituality of the organization through its influence on the socialization process. We therefore hypothesize that:

Putnam's (1993) position on social capital, which highlights such mutually benefiting features of social organization as networks, norms and social trust, and his argument that these features facilitate coordination and cooperation within the organization, supports our position that the social context is a crucial factor for the maintenance of the psychological contract at work. The social context of the organization, which is typified in the social capital within the organization, has been shown in literature to "facilitates coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (Putnam 1993, p. 35). As argued by Larsen et al. (2004) and pointed out earlier in this study, social capital emanates from the idea that relationships constitute a major resource just as other forms of capital within the organization.

Social relationships, which are both formal and informal (Rose, 1998), have remote and distinct associations with spiritual leadership. This confirms Konz and Ryan's (1999) position that the spirituality of the organization's leaders maintains the spirituality of the organization through its influence on the socialization process. From the foregoing, it can be adduced that social capital plays an important role in the achievement of organizational goals and will be a vehicle for entrenching the tenets of spiritual leadership in the organization. This is because social networks enhance access to, and exchange of information, enforcement of contracts and focusing on a shared vision and collective goals (Nahapiet & Goshak, 1998).

CONCLUSION

Character and leadership are not mutually exclusive. To bring character into the leadership of organizations in Africa, there is the need to create the right organizational context. This empirical review paper has shown a strong link between the learning and social organizational contexts, and the entrenchment of spiritual leadership, which is a transcendental leadership model. We therefore recommend that:

- Leaders of African based organizations should adopt the transcendental leadership model of spiritual leadership to lead with character.
- The learning organizational context should be strengthened to help organizational members unlearn unethical practices and learn value driven principles in the conduct of their businesses.

- The social organizational context should be strengthened to facilitate character driven organizational culture through a shared vision.

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