

# **The Impact of Spirituality on School Leadership**

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*This qualitative study examined the practices and perceptions of six school leaders through the lens of exemplary leadership and spiritual leadership practices. Literature abounds in the field of exemplary leadership practices but spiritual leadership is traditionally overlooked as a credible topic of scholarly research because of its assumed nexus with religion. The irony is that great leaders in history are not remembered for what they accomplished, but rather for the spiritual core of values they imparted to their followers: fairness, kindness, trust, respect, honesty and integrity. The findings of the study revealed clear consistency between this spiritual core of values and the practice of exemplary leadership. The study contends that by viewing spiritual leadership as a holistic practice that transcends denominational doctrine, the achievement of results is solidly built upon the universally accepted spiritual values of hope, faith, altruistic love and caring for the well-being of the human spirit. By 2025, millennials will represent two-thirds of the global work force (Pew Research Center, 2016). Further implications point to the importance of acknowledging the millennial generation's need to have greater work/life balance, meaning and purpose to their work if school districts hope to retain and attract a talented pool of school leaders.*

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## **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions and understanding of school leaders as they related to exemplary leadership and spiritual leadership practices to inform a more holistic, model of educational leadership. The intent of this study is to provide insight into a more holistic approach to leadership that recognizes the need for balance between the tensions inherent in the pursuit of desired school goals with the need to prioritize the well-being and care of the human spirit (Allison, 2011; Beisser, Peters, & Thacker, 2014; Boyatzis & McKee, 2005; Fry, 2003; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Reave, 2005).

The study focused primarily on school leaders' perceptions and practices that aligned with the dimensions of spiritual leadership and exemplary leadership practices. These four research questions were considered:

1. What are the perceptions and practices of school leaders that align with the dimensions of school leadership?
2. What are the perceptions and practices of school leaders that align with the dimensions of exemplary practices of leaders?
3. How do the spiritual leadership and exemplary practices and perceptions of school leaders relate to each other?
4. How might the convergence or divergence of spiritual leadership and exemplary practices as shown by the participants of this study inform a more holistic model of educational leadership?

## **Review of Literature**

### **Study of Spirituality**

Many social scientists, psychologists, and organizational researchers have undertaken the study of spirituality due to a substantial increase of interest over the past 20 years (Dent, Higgins, & Wharff, 2005; Fry, 2003; Fry & Nisiewicz, 2013; Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2010). Although some may consider the topic of spirituality unworthy of scientific study, the power it contains to transform traditional thinking about leadership is well worth the academic risk. Due to its nexus with religion, the working definition of spirituality for the purpose of this study was described as one that transcends denominational doctrine and practice and was understood as the kind of leadership that leads from deeper levels through purposeful actions and behaviors (Fry, 2003). When regarded within this context, spirituality is viewed as an individual phenomenon that is identified within the broader focus of finding a higher calling, meaning and purpose for one's life work (Miller & Thoresen, 2003; Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Scott, 1999; Zohar & Marshall, 2000).

### **Spiritual Intelligence**

The research of social and behavioral scientists has suggested that alternate forms of intelligence exist. Gardner (1999) expressed the existence of many forms of intelligence as outlined in his theory of multiple intelligences. Goleman (1990) proposed that along with intellectual ability, humans have the capacity for emotional intelligence to guide their thinking and behaviors. Zohar (2000) explored yet another form of intelligence called spiritual intelligence (SQ). This was described as the capacity for humans to develop self-awareness, holism, compassion, humility,

and a sense of vocation that celebrates diversity. Covey (2004) suggested, “spiritual intelligence is the central and most fundamental of all intelligences because it becomes the source of guidance” (p. 53). Other researchers have suggested that SQ is expressed through wisdom and compassion and the willingness to attend to the overall well-being of self and others (Wigglesworth, 2012). Other studies contend that SQ is the ability to ask ultimate questions about the meaning of life and to simultaneously experience a seamless connection between each of us and the world in which we live. (Amram, 2009; Helminiak, 2008; King, 2008; Vaughn, 2002; Wolman, 2001).

## **Spiritual Leadership and Exemplary Leadership Practices**

In this study, the review of the literature revealed two theories that were foundational to the determination of any interconnection that might exist between the practices of exemplary leaders and the dimension of spiritual leadership.

The first theory explored suggested that spiritual leadership involves “intrinsically motivating and inspiring workers through hope/faith in a vision of service to key stakeholders and a corporate culture based on altruistic love” (Fry & Nisiewicz, 2013, p. 4). Spiritual leadership transcends denominational doctrine and practice and is understood as the kind of leadership that leads from deeper levels through purposeful actions and behaviors (Houston, Blankstein, & Cole, 2008; Thompson, 2005; Wax, 2008; Wheatley, 2002). It embodies qualities and habits of mind traditionally overlooked in leadership literature: faith, patience, intuition, humility, inspiration and spirituality (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009; Day & Antonakis, 2012; Dweck, 2016; Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004; Riggio, 2008; Thompson, 2005).

The second theory, Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership, emerged from extensive research conducted by Kouzes and Posner (2007). Through the analysis of data collected from in-depth interviews, a theoretical framework of five leadership practices emerged. According to their study, exemplary leaders were at their best when they exhibited the practices of modeling the way through an inspired and shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart to motivate and inspire. The compelling research suggested that extraordinary things happened when leaders set the example of striving for excellence, thereby inspiring a shared vision that recognized and encouraged others to do the like. People follow the person first, then the plan.

Other researchers suggested that leaders will need to engage in transformative thinking about leadership if their intent is to improve the effectiveness of their organizations and address present multigenerational needs for greater work/life balance, well-being and work that has purpose and meaning (Beisser et al., 2014; French, Bell, & Zawacki, 2004). Further research may enhance understanding of the synergy needed to calm the sea of diversity represented in these multiple generational perspectives of those currently in the workforce (Lovely, 2005; Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010; Nicholson, 2008).

## **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

To better inform the research for this study, two theories were examined. Kouzes and Posner (2007) suggested that exemplary leaders are at their personal best and exhibit certain discernible practices that include modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act and encouraging the heart. The Five Practices of Exemplary leadership emerged from extensive

research conducted by Kouzes and Posner who wanted to know what exemplary leaders were doing when they were at their personal best. To find out, they collected and analyzed the results obtained from thousands of managers who answered questions on the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) that was supported by the triangulation of qualitative and quantitative research methods. Through the analysis of the data, a theoretical framework of five leadership practices emerged. According to Kouzes and Posner when at their best, exemplary leaders consistently exhibited practices in the following five categories: (a) Model the Way, (b) Inspire a Shared Vision, (c) Challenge the Process, (d) Enable Others to Act, and (e) Encourage the Heart.

Fry and Nisiewicz (2013) suggested that spiritual leadership attends to the fundamental needs of people by facilitating the intrinsic motivation needed to increase commitment and levels of productivity. Spiritual leadership transcends the practice of denominational religion and emphasizes well-being and the interconnectedness of relationships that help people derive meaning and make sense of the ultimate significance and quality of their life work (Houston et al., 2008; Thompson, 2005; Wax, 2008; Wheatley, 2002). The purpose of spiritual leadership is to meet the fundamental need of well-being for both leader and follower through calling and membership, a well-articulated vision, and to provide an environment conducive to value congruence across all levels. Skillful spiritual leaders know how to balance the needs of the organization and the worker to adapt for a kind of change that mobilizes others to engage in a struggle with shared aspirations (Fry & Nisiewicz, 2013; Fullan, 2016; Heifitz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009; Kouzes & Posner, 2012). The main components of spiritual leadership theory are the consistent practice of an inner life, the ability to inspire a shared vision through hope, faith, altruistic love, and a sense of calling to the profession.

## **Methodology**

A qualitative research paradigm was designed to explore the perceptions and practices of school leaders regarding exemplary leadership practices and the dimension of spiritual leadership (Creswell, 2012; Merriam 2009; Patton, 1999). Inductive analysis was used to examine the data collected to answer the research questions in this study. The data were comprised of semi-structured interviews, observations of the school leader in three different settings and the examination of artifacts from the participant's school (Braun & Clark, 2006).

Notes were taken by the researcher at the semi-structured interviews that were also tape-recorded, transcribed and shared with each participant to check for accuracy. Field notes were taken for observations of each participant as was a thorough examination of artifacts that included the school's website, handbooks, policies, school vision and mission, and general physical plant of the school. During the data collection phase of the study, the following strategies were implemented to increase quality and credibility: member checks, adequate engagement, researcher's journal, and maximum variation (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009; Corbin & Straus, 2008).

## **Sample**

Six participants were chosen from a pool of 80 doctoral students enrolled at a religiously affiliated university in a large, Midwestern city. The Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) was administered electronically to the entire pool of participants to determine which of the leaders exhibited a high number of self-reported above-average exemplary behaviors as identified by one

of two theories underpinning this study (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). The pool of participants was eventually refined to include six school leaders who were then studied in-depth. Through the purposeful selection of the participants, it was more likely that the data would yield high quality, detailed descriptions and highlight important shared patterns that allowed common themes to emerge (Patton, 1999). A summary of the criteria used for selection of the sample population and the demographics of the participants may be viewed in Tables 1 and Table 2.

Table 1  
*School Leaders Sampling Conceptual Definition Criterion*

Criteria	Rationale
Doctoral students at a religiously-affiliated university in the suburbs of a Midwestern state in the United States	Knowledge and practices that align with dimension of spiritual leadership (Fry, 2003)
Currently practicing Type 75 school leader certification with at least a master's degree	Knowledge of current practice and expectations regarding school leadership
School leaders who score above average in the six rankings of the Leadership Practices (Kouzes & Posner, 2007)	Knowledge and practice aligned with exemplary leadership practices (Kouzes & Posner, 2007)
Six school leaders with at least one practicing at each level: elementary, middle, and high school	Maximum variation of setting and type of school

Table 2  
*Demographics of Participants*

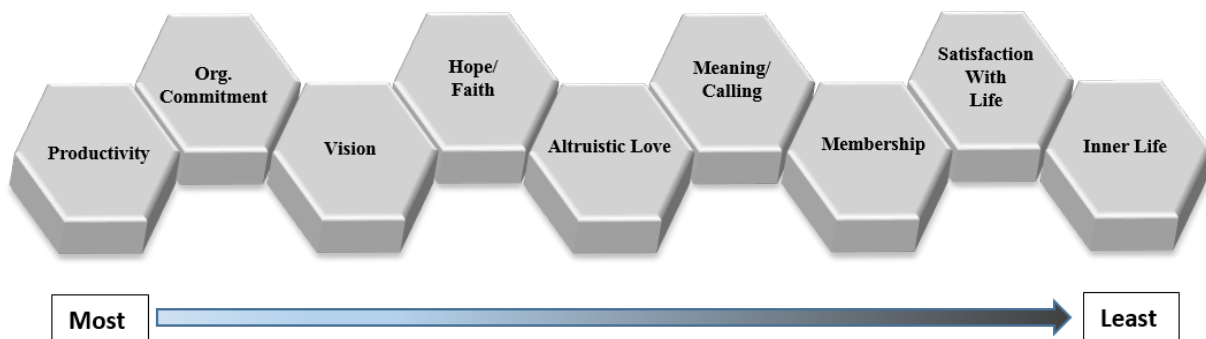
Participant	Age	Gender	Degree	Certification	School Setting	Position Held
1	32	F	BS/MA	TYPE 75	9-12/Public	Assistant Principal
2	30	F	BS/MA	TYPE 75	9-12/Public	Assistant Principal
3	56	F	BS/MA	TYPE 75	K-8/Private	Principal
4	43	M	BS/MA	TYPE 75	K-8/Public	Principal
5	34	M	BS/MA	TYPE 75	6-8/Public	Principal
6	37	M	BS/MA	TYPE 75	9-12/Public	Assistant Principal

## Results

The results derived from the thematic analysis of the data provided insight into each research question.

### Dimensions of Spiritual Leadership

Using the components of Fry's Theory of Spiritual Leadership (2003), all units of data were coded and analyzed through the process of thematic analysis leadership (Creswell, 2012; Merriam 2009; Patton, 1999). Several common threads emerged. The data collected clearly aligned with seven of the nine main categories of spiritual leadership: vision, hope/faith, altruistic love, meaning/calling, membership, organizational commitment, and productivity. The two areas indicated as areas of lesser alignment were related to consistent inner life practices and satisfaction with life. Four of the six leaders noted that they were "pretty happy" with their lives and indicated the lack of balance between personal and professional demands as being a stressful aspect of their life. This was further supported in the observational phase of the study where it was noted that all six leaders kept long hours, were time-starved and harried as they ran from one meeting to the next, and stopped only to answer emails or texts and to handle student discipline problems. The summary of the evidence collected for perceptions and practices that aligned to the dimension of spiritual leadership can be seen in Figure 1 and Table 3.



*Figure 1.* Most to least observed spiritual leadership practices (Adapted from Fry & Nisiewicz, 2013)

Table 3

*Research Question 1: Perceptions and Practices Aligned to Spiritual Leadership*

RQ1: What are the perceptions and practices of school leaders that align with the dimensions of spiritual leadership?	
Participant	Evidence
1	“Your vision drives everything you do”; “All I do is for the future of our school”; I always try to put myself in their shoes”; “My work is meaningful”; “I am committed”; “I feel responsible for the school’s progress”; “I feel pretty happy”; “I am planning my wedding around school responsibilities”; Memory Garden for veterans; website “Expect Excellence” historical murals observed throughout school.
2	“We are an exemplary learning community”; “We believe in our at-risk students”; “I use a great deal of ethics when disciplining”; “I am a spiritual person”; “We are like family here”; “I knew there was something bigger to do in leadership”; “I’m newly married and wish I had more time to spend with my husband”; Deferred Dreams Program for at-risk students.
3	“We educate the mind and nurture the soul”; “I hope that what I do matters each day to every student”; “God has given each student special gifts”; “I greet every child each day”; “I feel appreciated for my work”; “Sometimes I come in on the weekends to catch up”; “I have high expectations of myself and my staff.”
4	“I am future oriented”; “I have a passion for what I do”; “We like to laugh to help each other get through tough times”; “My faith is tied closely to the way I conduct myself professionally”; “I have a wonderful home life”; “Frequent interruptions are tough to deal with”; inspirational messages in student handbook.
5	“All of my decisions focus on children”; “Leadership goes back to service, you have to walk the walk”; “Each day is fueled by my passion to do my best for everyone”; “I don’t mind living and working in the same community”; “I am a committed, faith-abiding man”; cabinet members repeated vision and mission at all staff meetings.
6	“Our district’s vision guides us”; “Share in places that are dangerous, lean on each other, take risks”; “When you treat people with respect, they respect you”; “It’s nice to know you are part of something bigger than yourself”; “There’s never enough time to finish my list of to do’s”; success-focused messages in student handbook and on website “Every day is a new beginning.”

**Dimensions of Exemplary Practices of Leaders**

The Leadership Practices Inventory–Self-Report by Kouzes and Posner (2007) was used as criteria selection for the participants of this study. Evidence for all five of the exemplary

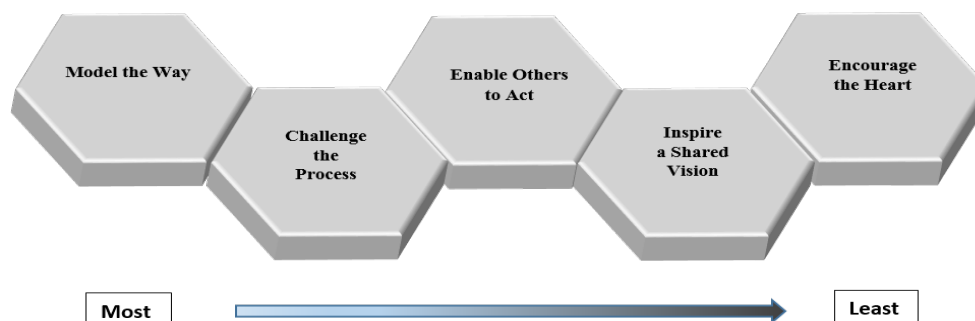
practices were noted on the self-report, the semi-structured interviews, observations and artifacts. On the self-report, it was noted that the leaders viewed themselves as most capable of having the ability to encourage others to act by modeling the way. They also saw themselves as capable of challenging the process and inspiring a shared vision in their school. They generally indicated less confidence in their ability to encourage the heart of others. The thematic analysis of the data demonstrated a similar pattern. Leaders clearly had the ability to set a clear, direct path related to the school vision and to challenge teachers to take academic risks. The leaders exhibited humble, selfless dispositions, had excellent listening skills and offered patient guidance that enabled the teachers and students to perform to their fullest potential. Leaders had little time to think about celebrating accomplishments on a regular basis indicating a lesser ability to encouraging the heart. A summary of evidence for perceptions and practices aligned to exemplary leadership is shown in Table 4 and Figure 2.

Table 4

*Research Question 2: Perceptions and Practices Aligned to Exemplary Leadership*

RQ2: What are the perceptions and practices of school leaders that align with the five exemplary practices of school leaders?	
Participant	Evidence
1	"I work with new teachers to help them balance their lives"; "Vision should be recognized by everyone"; "I challenge teachers to incorporate more descriptive data"; "Girls are encouraged to pursue math and engineering"; "I bring donuts if I can from time to time"; school was chosen as "America's Best High School-U.S. News."
2	"I make an extra effort and take extra steps with teachers"; "Our vision is to make the community feel like this is their home"; "You have to see all sides of the student's problems, they need someone to back them up"; "You have to hope every student will learn from a situation"; "When we can get together, sometimes we do celebrations during lunch"; website stated, "We seek excellence for all"; student awards posted in atrium.
3	"I start each day new and don't hold on to things"; "You have to be committed to what you do and why you do it"; "I try to understand and don't expect others to do what I don't"; "I'm proud of my teachers"; Christian principles on website "Educating the Mind, Nurturing the Soul."
4	"I have the ability to touch all stakeholders in my position"; "I am a school leader because I impact students in a larger way"; "I support the well-being of my staff"; "I try to recognize individuals when they do well with my positive energy."
5	"We teach today for a successful tomorrow"; "It's o.k. to be vulnerable to failure – we don't take enough risks"; "When two sides disagree, we balance each other's perspectives"; "We celebrate success"; "I write notes to thank people"; stated on website "Helping Children Achieve Dreams."
6	"Professional harmony is realized when everyone knows what is expected"; "The vision defines what we do each day"; "We need to lean into some uncomfortable times together"; "We are colleagues first and

	foremost”; “It is seldom that anyone calls you up to tell you that you’ve done a good job”; “Believe you can and you’re half-way there” in student handbook.
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*Figure 2. Most to least exemplary leadership practices (Adapted from Kouzes & Posner, 2007)*

### **Spiritual Leadership and Exemplary Practices and Perceptions of School Leaders**

The thematic analysis of the data suggested that all nine dimensions of spiritual leadership could be related to one or more of the five practices of exemplary leadership (Fry, 2003; Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Spiritual leadership and exemplary practices were intertwined and although they could be coded separately during the analysis, the data most often demonstrated strength of evidence in both dimensions. Common themes that emerged indicated that exemplary leadership practice emanated from a solid base of spiritual values that included humility, altruistic love, integrity, and high standards for excellence. The data analysis further revealed common themes indicating that the high-achieving leaders in this study were passionate about their work and regarded caring for the well-being of their teachers as important. The selfless efforts of the leaders inspired relationships that were founded on hope, faith and mutual respect as demonstrated through their collegial interactions. The analysis suggested that each leader felt great purpose and meaning for their work, but also revealed that they frequently felt stressed and yearned for more time to devote to family. The continual pressure to provide better results for their schools contributed significantly to their stress levels. Despite this, the participants reported that they remained hopeful and believed that their efforts contributed to the accomplishment of something bigger than themselves. Each of the leaders expressed a belief in the existence of a “higher, guiding power.”

### **Convergence or Divergence of Spiritual Leadership and Exemplary Practices**

In the thematic analysis of the data, each of the leaders consistently demonstrated all five of the exemplary leadership practices and seven of the nine dimensions of spiritual leadership. Convergence was indicated through common themes that emerged to suggest that the exemplary leadership practices of modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart of others were greatly complimented and supported through the embodiment of spiritual values such as humility, altruistic love, integrity and high levels of productivity and excellence. This spiritual core of values facilitated the interconnectedness needed to sustain the level of effort required in the achievement of a shared vision. Triangulation

of the data collected from various sources was compelling and indicated convergence of the two dimensions through the words, actions and artifacts of the school leaders. Care for the well-being of others was fully extended by the leaders, but it was noted in all cases that this came at the expense of their own ability to achieve work/life balance. This suggested that meeting the demands of their job forced their own personal lives and well-being to be placed on the “back burner” which resulted in a lower than expected level of satisfaction with life.

## **Conclusions**

Leading today’s complex school environments calls for a different kind of leadership. DuFour and Marzano (2011) suggested that the changing role of contemporary school leaders presents the most daunting challenges in the history of public education. To meet the requirements now inherent in the role, school leaders are asked to navigate environments where more than a compendium of administrative skills are needed to effectively lead a school (Beisser et al., 2014; Sparks, 2016). Through the study of exemplary school leadership practices as they related to spiritual leadership, this study boldly attempted to address the intangible, but discernable spiritual aspect of exemplary school leadership.

It was the aim of this study to examine the potential that the convergence of these two dimensions of leadership may have in providing a more holistic way of practicing school leadership that takes both the need for exemplary leadership and the well-being of both leader and follower into account. The research from this study suggests that setting high expectations and providing direction alone is not sufficient for the kind of leadership needed in today’s schools. Upon closer examination, spiritual leadership may be the catalyst that empowers exemplary school leaders to perform in meaningful, productive ways that link the caring aspect of leadership with the need to increase student achievement.

The main finding of this study suggested that spiritually connected leaders are exemplary and exemplary leaders are spiritually-connected. Exemplary leadership that flows from the spiritual elements of mutual respect and care for one another inspires the intrinsic motivation required of self and others to achieve extraordinary results that produce a compelling and different future in the organization (Fry & Nisiewicz, 2013; Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Analysis of the data revealed compelling evidence that the practice of exemplary leadership emanated from a solid core of spiritual values that was foundational to the effective practice of school leadership. Research outcomes clearly suggested that exemplary leaders who were at their best (Kouzes & Posner, 2007) practiced leadership that was integrated with a strong, spiritual core that balanced the need for achieving results by first prioritizing the need to have care and concern for the well-being of self and others (Fry & Nisiewicz, 2013). It was discovered that the perspectives of exemplary leadership and spiritual leadership are complimentary practices that focus on the importance of achieving organizational goals by also highlighting the need for attention to the heart, soul and well-being of those in pursuit of those results.

The second conclusion suggested that the “art of mobilizing others to want to struggle for shared aspirations” (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 30) was found at the intersection of exemplary leadership and the dimension of spiritually connected practices. The participants in the study consistently exhibited deeply embedded spiritual values that resided at the core of effective leadership practices to form holistic leadership that flowed from a sense of inner peace and clarity. This holistic practice of school leadership was equally focused on the integration of the need for high levels of productivity and achievement with the ultimate concern of caring about

people and their well-being foremost. At this crossroads, the exemplary leaders emanated from a core of spirituality that was strongly supported by their ability to steward a clear and compelling vision for their school, a genuine conviction to the higher meaning and purpose of their work, and possessed the ability to challenge the process by striving to “do whatever it took” to solve issues with innovative thinking that supported and encouraged others to do the like.

The third conclusion of the study revealed a somewhat unanticipated finding that greater emphasis on the congruence between well-being (inner life) and the pressure to achieve results (outer life) is needed to positively impact the leader’s ability to effectively create balance between their work and personal life. The school leaders in this study worked no less than 60 hours each week making it difficult to manage the demands placed upon them by their professional lives with the need to have personal time for family. This finding suggests the urgent need to address the dissonance that leaders may be experiencing between their “inner and outer” worlds. This dissonance may be at the foundation of job-imposed stress experienced and perhaps one of the reasons many principals leave the profession within the first three years of their tenure. (Allison, 2011; Strickland-Cohen, McIntosh, & Homer, 2014; Superville, 2014).

The fourth conclusion puts forth the idea that both achievement and well-being are equally as critical to the school improvement process. Further support for this conclusion can be found in the recently released 2015 Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL). The new standards which were researched and developed in response to the changing characteristics and demographics of children and their family structures amidst incessant funding cuts and higher levels of accountability, are a step in the right direction toward achieving this goal. For the first time, each of the ten PSEL (2015) standards now embodies research-based best practices that guide improving student achievement through a holistic view of leadership that includes the aspect of well-being. Without question, such changes are creating a myriad of challenges for school leaders and will require a different way of looking at leadership (NPBEA, 2015).

### **Implications of the Research**

This study was initiated to explore the perceptions and understanding of school leaders as they related to exemplary leadership and spiritual leadership practices. Findings suggest that greater care for the human spirit as demonstrated through better work/life balance is needed by both school leaders and those who work in schools. The relentless pressure and pursuit of results has taken a toll on school leaders that may be at the expense of their well-being and the nurturing of their human spirit. Several implications from this study provide insight into a more holistic form of leadership that reprioritizes the importance of equilibrium between well-being of the individuals in the organization and the pursuit of organizational goals.

The first implication of this study is the need to refocus current thinking about school improvement to avoid a one-dimensional direction that focuses on achieving results. The difficult work that is dictated by the challenging and diverse needs of students in today’s schools is best supported through a more holistic, view of leadership. When the core spiritual values of fairness, kindness, trust, respect, honesty and integrity are embedded in the practice of exemplary leadership, care of the human spirit and well-being is ensured and becomes the inspiration needed to continue the struggle for shared aspirations.

The second implication is that because the school leaders in this study were clearly observed to be overextended, time-starved and unable to maintain maximum work/life balance. They may benefit from further mentoring and coaching to create meaningful, spiritual

connections that may help them maintain the resilience needed to overcome these obstacles. Learning how to create intentional time and space throughout the day to recollect thought processes through quiet, spiritual and mindful reflection may help school leaders refresh and refocus on the tangible impact that their levels of stress have upon the well-being of themselves and others.

The final implication of this study is that as suggested in the six dimensions of wellness, most diseases can be traced back to chronic, sustained levels of stress (Hettler, 2017). The high levels of stress, as experienced by school leaders, may suggest reasons for early burnout resulting in talented leaders leaving or never considering the profession. It is recommended that districts and policymakers take a “salutogenic” approach in the care of school leaders by proactively seeking to develop wellness programs aimed specifically at creating healthy lifestyles for school leaders (Allison, 2011; Becker, Glascoff, & Felts, 2010; Strickland-Cohen et al., 2014; Superville, 2014).

As accountability measures, high stakes testing and the standards movement becomes more ingrained in the culture of schools, there is little hope that the workload and pressure placed upon school leaders will be lessened. Spiritual leadership may be the catalyst that empowers exemplary school leaders to be resilient and perform in meaningful, productive ways that encourage themselves and others to join in the struggle toward better achievement for all students. By considering spirituality and wellness in the equation of school improvement the important work done in schools may have a ripple effect that radiates goodness outward from the epicenter of what really matters in schools, to care and nurture the human spirit.

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