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Faculty perspectives on the inclusion of spirituality topics in nonsectarian leadership and management education programs

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore faculty views on the inclusion of spiritual topics in graduate leadership and management programs, focusing on faculty experiences, perceived benefits and challenges, and teaching methods and principles in use. We interviewed twelve faculty members in leadership or management programs from eleven nonsectarian universities. Participants discussed eight benefits including the opportunity for whole person growth and skill development that would benefit leaders in a global workplace. Eight barriers to such inclusion were identified such as proselytizing and the misuse of power. The sampled instructors also made some suggestions for how to include spirituality topics, such as using respected resources and linking classroom discussions to practice. Overall, instructors' preference for including spiritual topics also varied in terms of explicit versus implicit and organic-emergent versus preplanned-structured approaches.

1. Introduction

The literature about spirituality in the workplace has grown especially since Mitroff and Denton's *A Spiritual Audit of Corporate America* (1999) and the special issues of the *Journal of Management Education* (Dehler & Neal, 2000) and *The Leadership Quarterly* (Fry, 2005). Correspondingly, there has been an upsurge of discussion about the role of spirituality in leadership and management education with Bento (2000), Delbecq (2010), Harlos (2000), McCormick (2006), Pielstick (2005), Nash and Scott (2009), Trott (2012), and others discussing ways in which they have incorporated spiritual topics into graduate management and leadership courses. In spite of the growth of the spirituality in the workplace literature and many anecdotal accounts of including spirituality in leadership and management courses, we noticed a lack of research in leadership and management education literature; more specifically, we found no empirical research focusing on faculty perspectives on including spiritual topics in expressly non-aligned (secular, multi-faith, nonsectarian) graduate leadership and management education programs. Lindholm and Astin (2011) note that "with few exceptions the research on spirituality that has been conducted within higher education institutions has focused primarily on students, ignoring completely the experiences, attitudes, expectations, and behaviors of faculty" (p. 51).

As leadership educators, we have observed that many students desire opportunities to explore the role of their spirituality in their own leadership education and development. These students may identify with organized religious or non-religious spiritualities. Several authors (e.g. Delbecq 2010) have made similar assertions regarding professional students' interest in the topic. Consistent with this interest and in line with other arguments related to the positive benefits of including spirituality such as improving leaders' balance (Delbecq, 2010), whole-person education, and religious-cultural literacy (Nash and Scott, 2009), some instructors have included spiritual topics in their management and leadership classes. Strange and Rogers (2011) also point to the institutional desire to do the same: "Many institutions are beginning to reconsider the divide between religion and education, and to search for new ways of connecting once

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again to a more complete vision of students' lives" (p. 30). From a pedagogical perspective, the inclusion of spiritual topics in leadership and management classes must be done recognizing the tensions inherent in a curriculum that prepares students for a diverse context in which they will probably work (Lewis & Geroy, 2000) while also acknowledging the students' desire to express themselves authentically through their leadership (Nash & Scott, 2009).

We teach in graduate programs and chose to focus our inquiry on the graduate, adult, professional learners. In a previous study (Allen & Williams, 2015), we surveyed graduate leadership and management students, exploring student views on the inclusion of spiritual topics in their graduate programs. That study suggested a generally positive outlook on inclusion, but also found a small percentage (approximately 20%) of students who were uncomfortable with including such topics. The participants identified clear connections between leaders' spiritual (or religious) beliefs and their leadership, echoing the sentiment of authors like Cashman (2008) and Judge (2009) who suggest leaders' spiritual lives impact and support their leadership. That initial study on student views, along with our teaching practice, sparked our interest in faculty views and experiences related to the benefits, barriers, and methods of including spiritual topics.

To explore faculty views, we searched the literature for guidance on if and how instructors should include spiritual topics in an already packed curriculum. While existing reports provide positive examples of including spirituality in leadership and management courses (e.g., Delbecq, 2010; Pielstick, 2005, Trott, 2012), these articles are case reports rather than systematic research attempts, suggesting the authors had already decided to include spiritual topics. They provided some valuable insight for us, but they did not answer the compelling questions that arose from our teaching practice: Should we include spiritual topics in an already packed curriculum? In our decision, what barriers and benefits should we consider? If we decide to include spiritual topics, how should we do so? Given our practice-oriented questions and the lack of research on the topic, we saw a need for a systematic investigation into the views and approaches of a broader array of instructors. The purpose of this study was to explore faculty views on the inclusion

of spiritual topics in graduate leadership and management courses, including a focus on faculty experiences, perceived benefits and challenges, and teaching methods and principles in use.

2. Spirituality defined

The challenge with defining spirituality is well acknowledged in the leadership and management literature with definitions varying widely (see Dent, Higgins, and Wharff, 2005). In their narrative analysis of leadership and spirituality literature focusing on workplace spirituality, Dent, et al., (2005) found that the majority of authors included in their definition of spirituality “a search for meaning, reflection, inner connectedness, creativity, transformation, sacredness, and energy” (p. 633). We do not attempt to resolve the issue of defining spirituality in this study. However, Puchalski, Ferrell, Virani et al. (2009) provide a definition which may be useful to readers: “The aspect of humanity that refers to the way individuals seek and express meaning and purpose, and the way they experience their connectedness to the moment, to self, to others, to nature, and to the significant or sacred” (p. 887). Many authors also point to the need to clarify and discuss the relationship between spirituality and religion (e.g. Marx, Neal, Manz, & Manz, 2008). Fry et al. (2011) acknowledge this association suggesting, “spirituality is necessary for religion, but religion is not necessary for spirituality” (p. 260).

3. Background literature

Grzeda and Assogbavi (2011) recognize that the literature includes numerous examples of instructors sharing how they have included spiritual topics in their leadership or management classes. Delbecq (2000; 2005; 2010) stands out because of his explicit focus on spiritual topics in an entire graduate elective presented at a Silicon Valley business school. Authors such as Pielstick (2005) and Marx, et al. (2008) provide detailed suggestions on how educators can include spiritual topics in graduate classroom activities. Nash and Scott (2009) make a case for the inclusion of spiritual topics in higher education in general. Despite the several articles on the topic, it is still problematic and possibly contentious for instructors who wish to include spiritual topics in leadership and management education classes (e.g. Strange & Rogers, 2011; Waggoner, 2011).

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Amongst the articles published on the role of spirituality in leadership or the inclusion of spiritual topics, we found none that explicitly argue against the inclusion of spiritual topics. However, authors such as Marcic (2000), McCormick (2006), and Tourish and Tourish (2010) have questioned the inclusion of spiritual topics mentioning the risks of indoctrination and domination in discussions of spirituality in leadership and management education. Most authors, however, describe their own experience, discussing the *why*, *what*, and *how* of this integration through reflection on their teaching in general (see McCormick, 2010) or provide a sort of case description reporting on their experiences in a particular graduate program (see Bento, 2000; Dhiman & Marques, 2011; Katz, 2011; Marcic, 2000; Nash & Scott 2008; Pielstick, 2005; Trott, 2012). While many of these reflective essays are valuable anecdotal cases of such inclusion, we did not find any empirical research exploring the views of faculty. In the following paragraphs, we summarize the literature we found under the categories of benefits, challenges, and instructional methods of inclusion. While we recognize others may see different themes in the literature, we approached the literature with these categories in mind, arising from our teaching and previous research. With a focus on leadership and management education practice, our intent has been to explore the benefits that encourage faculty to include spiritual topics in their class, the concerns they have about this inclusion, and the instructional approaches used or recommended. We searched the leadership and management education literature and also considered the broader literature (e.g. English & Gillen, 2000; Waggoner, 2011) on spirituality in higher education.

Benefits: Benefits previously discussed in the literature include engaging the whole person (Nash & Scott, 2009), increased awareness of spiritual diversity and religious literacy (Marcic, 2000), and overcoming egocentrism (Delbecq, 2005). Delbecq (2005) mentions feedback from students noting benefits such as “‘greater ability to be present to my colleagues,’ ‘more open to non-confirming opinions from team members,’ ‘less need to impose control and more willing to allow a solution to evolve,’ [and] ‘more focused and less scattered due to anxiety’”(p. 244). Dhiman and Marques (2011) note that students who attended their course in workplace spirituality acknowledged the following benefits to their personal

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leadership: enhanced awareness of the meaning of work and their own behavior, awareness of their role in society, greater reflection on personal and career goals, a greater focus on ethics and altruism, and greater reflection and sense of responsibility.

Concerns and Challenges: Concerns and challenges raised in the literature include the subjective nature of the topic, the diversity present in the classroom (Klenke, 2005), the potential for instructors to be seen as proselytizing (Marcic, 2000), classroom discussions resulting in negative emotion or tension, discomfort, or anxiety when sharing spiritual views in class, and disrespect of spiritual choices or beliefs (citation redacted for blind review). McCormick (2006) discusses “the problem of a [instructor’s] dominating spiritual ideology” (p. 79), going on to explore concerns about intentional or unintentional indoctrination. Similarly, Tourish and Tourish (2010) focus on the post-structural problem of spirituality being used to coerce or oppress workers, which might apply to the classroom in reinforcing oppressive societal structures. Students are also concerned that their fellow students might try to dominate spiritual or religious discussions (Allen & Williams, 2015). Bento (2000) relates a concern about compelling students to engage in spiritual exploration (or attempting to grade their spiritual exploration). Klenke (2003) highlights that spirituality may be considered a private matter for some students who may prefer to keep it out of the classroom. Outside the leadership and management literature, Vogel (2000) notes that some students may have been wounded by others acting on perceived authority of God or a religious institution, while Ejising (2007) mentions the risks of self-disclosure within the context of the power differential between student and teacher.

Instructional Methods of Inclusion: In terms of methods and principles that can guide instructors when integrating spiritual topics into courses, various authors make both direct and indirect suggestions. McCormick (2006) emphasizes the need for informed consent (students knowing how spirituality is included and having choices about participation), teaching from academic authority rather than spiritual authority, encouraging respect through an established set of norms, not privileging the instructor’s beliefs, presenting diverse perspectives, teaching about the topic, and using universal educational design

principles suited to all students regardless of spiritual or religious preferences. Bento (2000) highlights the need not to “teach the students, because my answers would not be theirs” (p. 651). Barnett, Krell, and Sendry (2000) propose “to teach students about spirituality by changing our usual professional focus away from the course content (i.e., spirituality per se, which is for all intents and purposes unknowable) and instead toward the instructional process that enables students to learn how to learn about their own spirituality” (p. 564). Barnett, Krell, and Sendry also highlight the students’ need for privacy. Many authors discuss the importance of clarifying the meanings of spirituality for students and understanding the relationship of spirituality to religion (e.g. Marx et al., 2008; Marcic, 2000). Pielstick (2005) reports on his use of an initial clarification to students on the intent and purpose of including spirituality in the leadership or management class.

4. Methodology

The emphasis of this study was on interviewing a broader sample of faculty in a systematic way to add to the individual voices of instructors who have already published reports on their inclusion of spiritual topics in their classes. By engaging a range of instructors we hoped to hear a variety of views on the benefits, challenges, and suggestions.

Given our intent to explore the views of faculty, we chose a qualitative research design consisting of telephonic, semi-structured interviews with twelve graduate faculty teaching at eleven secular, nonsectarian, or multi-faith universities. Our purposive, nonprobability sample (Glesne, 2011) included a range of faculty: experienced and novice instructors from various US states, including both management and leadership programs (see Table 1). We accomplished this purposeful variation by using our professional contacts and some snowball sampling (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012), with a focus on attaining a sample that represented different universities (11), US states (6), experienced and novice instructors, and management and leadership programs. We asked our contacts to recommend colleagues who teach on graduate leadership or management programs. We did not include in our sample anyone with whom we worked at the time.

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After Institutional Review Board approval, we emailed invitations to twelve potential participants. Two potential participants responded after the cutoff date and two informed us of their lack of interest in the study's focus, requiring us to invite four more participants from our initial list. Some volunteer bias is likely but was less of concern given the moderate to high participation rate (75%). In addition, the number of comments we received from the 12 participants that we classified as reservations on the role of spirituality in courses (at least half of the sample) is evidence the sample was not biased towards viewing the inclusion of spiritual topics positively. Prior to data collection, we field tested our interview protocol, refined the questions, and determined the length of interview was sufficient for establishing necessary rapport needed for gathering rich data without being discouragingly long. With participants' consent we recorded the twelve interviews and then transcribed the recordings. The interviews lasted around 45 minutes each with the shortest being 30 minutes and the longest 90 minutes. We concluded our sampling after interviewing twelve faculty with consideration of Daniel's (2012) outline of typical sample sizes and upon experiencing data saturation (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007, Suter, 2011).

We framed the context for participants as graduate leadership and management programs, as some had experiences in multiple programs or taught leadership related topics within management programs. In addition to some initial questions about the faculty members' experience with spirituality and leadership (familiarity with spirituality literature and with including spirituality in programs, see table 1), we asked the following five main questions: 1) Describe your views and level of comfort on the inclusion of topics related to spirituality in graduate programs? (additional probing for benefits and challenges); 2) What do you think are the barriers or challenges to such inclusion?; 3) What experience have you had with including, excluding, or encountering spiritual issues in your teaching or classes?; 4) What changes or trends do you see related to inclusion of topics related to spirituality in leadership and management education programs?; and 5) What principles or methods would you propose to guide the inclusion of spiritual topics as a theme with leadership education programs?" We followed up with probing questions as necessary to better understand each participant's perspective (Kvale, 2007).

Table 1. Sample demographics .

Years Teaching	1-5yrs 1	6-10yrs 5	11-15yrs 2	16-20yrs 0	20+yrs 4
Teaching Area (includes duplicates)	Leadership 11		Management 8		
Qualification	Masters 1		Doctorate 11		
Familiarity with scholarly lit. on spirituality	Not Familiar 1		Some 6	Very Familiar 5	
Experience including spirituality in teaching	None 3		Some 8	Significant 1	

We initially analyzed the data individually by reading and coding the transcripts. In our analysis of each transcript, we noted several participants told of specific occasions in teaching that were salient to them. The analysis involved a careful coding of each interview and identification of salient topics in each, rooted in the context of the participant. This holistic interpretation approach (Collins, 1998; Glesne, 2011; Smith & Osborn, 2008; Willis, 2007) is represented in the findings section by the two exemplary narratives. Then, in cross-interview analysis and comparison we used Dedoose’s (2013) online software for the second and third rounds of coding. We then shared our codes, compared them, merged and adjusted wording, and organized them into clusters that became our themes. This analysis yielded three categories of themes in line with our research and interview questions: a) benefits to including spiritual topics; b) concerns and challenges about including spiritual topics; and c) methods and principles for including spiritual topics. Each category contained between 8 and 12 themes. Using these initial themes, we returned to the data to check for fit, including the possible need for additional themes, merging of themes, or discarding themes (Kratwohl, 2012). This step included checking the frequency of themes, which resulted in us dropping some less represented themes. We also exchanged four transcripts, which we coded to check inter-coder reliability at the code level. This resulted in additional refinements to our

code book. Using both a holistic approach to interpretation and a cross-interview thematic analysis provided a level of analysis triangulation (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007).

5. Findings

The study's findings are presented in two sections that represent two approaches to presenting qualitative data; the first section is a holistic approach and the second is more atomistic (thematic analysis; see Willis 2007). First, two narratives are presented for illustrative purposes and to build context for readers in which participants told of incidents that were key examples of how spirituality has come up in class and their reflections upon how they facilitated the discussion. We provide fewer comments so that the reader is not constrained by our interpretation. The presentation of these narratives, with their contrasts and commonalities, is in line with the belief that meaning exists in context (see Collins, 1998; Glesne, 2011, Willis, 2007). In the second section we present the results of our thematic analysis.

5.1 Two narratives

The following narratives were chosen for their wholeness as narratives (ability to stand alone as a story) and for their richness in length and detail. There were other narratives, but they did not share the richness and flow of the two below. The narratives have been edited to remove identifiers, and punctuation was added to aid reading. Otherwise, the essence of each is unchanged. The context of the first narrative is a graduate leadership class in organizational communications:

My most fun class in several years [was] two summers ago, a communications class in the intersession, with 12 or so students that met every day 8-5; we had people from many faiths, Muslim, Hindu, US based, ... Catholics, and we got into conversations about it in which students were able to ask each other questions about their faith. As usual my policy is we introduce ourselves, so we started with introductions at 8:30 and didn't finish till 4 pm. One of the first introductions was by a woman from Saudi Arabia, a Muslim lady, and a student from [city near the University] asked her "why do you wear that on your head, I don't really understand?" She could have said that's private but went into great

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detail explaining what it is, why they wear it. That led to another question, and then the girl from Malaysia sitting next to her was dressed in western attire, mentioned “Well you know, I am kind of cheating because I should be wearing that, but I’m not because I don’t like to answer those questions but I’m glad you did that -- that we’re talking about this.” The unit wasn’t about spirituality in the workplace, but I just said that we all demonstrate our spirituality in this class and in the workplace by what we wear, what we say, etc. I don’t think anybody in that class had any issues and they left the class knowing when you get into the workplace you’re going to have a lot of that – and how that impacts decision making. I can’t take any credit for that, that class just kind of evolved –only about 12 students, because as they talked about who they were, it came out. If students weren’t mature enough it probably wouldn’t have worked. I didn’t do anything but tried to give a safe environment. I steered it to a communication issue, first impressions, I talked about how dress communicates in the workplace, and how our spirituality may be conveyed by how you dress, speak, react, etc. I didn’t do anything different to facilitate that, really.

The context of the second narrative is a graduate class on leadership and diversity:

Once I was teaching leadership and diversity – diversity training, etc. I broadened the class from just racial to multiple perspectives on identity so people could deal with it in an honest way. When same sex marriage came up, I didn’t put an article in there, there was a little article in one of our books on what it feels like to be gay -- only 1 page on being gay in the whole text. The people who brought it up were talking about black civil rights and attacks on African Americans in the workplace, they were saying gay struggles were not about civil rights. But not all African Americans in the classroom believed that gay rights were not civil rights ...[resulting in]... an active debate in a diverse group. The spiritual basis behind it had to be surfaced, because those that were adamant that it wasn’t civil rights were the ones who thought it was a sin. I don’t bring up hot buttons, but I let

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them bring up issues from the readings. I try to frame and facilitate ... If spirituality hadn't been explicitly given "permission to speak" then what was behind the idea wouldn't have been ... revealed. People had opportunity to air their whole construction and hear others' whole story without it turning into a polarized discussion like gay versus black, or gay versus straight. It was really hard to do because people were passionate. But then that happened, in the rest of the class people started asking lots of questions. Because that's the other thing I do, I ask people, I model how to frame a question.....As that went on, it becomes easier and easier to bring up such..... well, would you feel that way if you weren't a Christian? there's potential for people feeling attacked. We were talking about invisible and visible diversities in the workplace. Underneath invisible diversities are other even more invisible diversities.

Both narratives are examples of organic or emergent inclusion of spiritual topics; as well, they highlight how the instructors made conscious facilitation choices. Only a minority of our participants explicitly included spiritual topics in their class (e.g. including in the syllabus or introducing the topic in the first class), while some others introduced or facilitated the emergence of the topic with questions or texts or looked for opportunities to introduce the topic when students expressed their own spiritual or religious views or experiences. Some did not introduce the topic at all but allowed it to emerge as students brought it up. While both examples, above, tend to focus more on religion and religious diversity than on spirituality, many of the examples in the next section demonstrate the engagement of non-religious spiritual issues in leadership and management.

5.2 Thematic analysis

In the initial analysis of the twelve interview transcripts, we found the responses to our questions about the three areas (benefits, challenges, and principles or methods for inclusion) yielded various themes for each category. Eight themes were identified in the benefits category, eight themes in challenges, and eleven themes related to principles (or methods). The codes, descriptions, and exemplary excerpts are

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included below in tables. We chose to use tables for two reasons: first, to present a large amount of narrative information in a reduced space thereby showing portions of the data to the reader efficiently; and second, to present the collection of themes in each category more visually to allow the reader to see them all in one place (Slone, 2009).

5.2.1 Benefits.

Participants noted several benefits to including spirituality in leadership or management classes (see Table 2), with most being related to personal growth and development (including skill and attitude development) and to pedagogical advantages (e.g. deeper discussions, source of principles). Several participants mentioned the advantage of addressing students' growth as leaders without excluding spiritual aspects. Faculty recognized that, for many students (and their potential followers in the workplace), their spirituality is an important aspect of their identity and they would prefer to include it in discussions about their growth as leaders. Faculty also discussed the need to develop skills and attitudes for working with people from many cultures, worldviews, and religions: attitudes of respect and humility along with the skills related to motivation of others, dialogue about sensitive topics, and team building with diverse individuals. Faculty felt that including topics related to spirituality allowed them to address these skills and attitudes at a deeper level.

There are also pedagogical advantages to the inclusion of spiritual topics, which may indirectly impact instruction related to other leadership and management topics. Faculty noted that if spirituality is "given permission to speak" (participant 2), then deeper discussions may emerge on topics such as decision making, motivation, ethics, and diversity, and these more profound discussions sometimes lead to deeper understanding of others who believe differently. For example, if students have shared, or heard other students talk about their spirituality (and corresponding belief systems), then the instructor can make connections, or ask students to make such connections, to various leadership principles (e.g. How do you treat people? How do you handle conflict? Why?).

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Organizational benefits were also mentioned, with a focus on creating workplaces where people want to work, connecting the culture and vision of the organization to leaders' and followers' spiritual selves. The need to understand people as well as their needs and motivations was also acknowledged with an emphasis on the importance of spirituality to the identities of many people.

Table 2. Benefits themes, descriptions and examples.

Theme	Description	Example Quote
Whole Person	Embracing, educating the whole person, related to finding meaning and purpose, acknowledging spirituality as a source of strength, attracting and meeting the needs of students who see relevance of spirituality or religion to leadership and their education	“The major benefit for me is in educating and supporting the development of the whole person rather than the cognitive development only”
Global Workplace	Teaching how to work in a diverse and global workplace including sensitivity, humility, respect for other cultures, worldviews, religious and non-religious viewpoints	“... yes, it talks about the representation of who we are in the world. What I mean is that ... I am one cog in the wheel and everybody is a cog that has something to contribute. There is a sensitivity and respect of humanity that I root my own spirituality in versus the arrogance of believing I have a little niche on what is right and proper ... humility I think comes from a spiritual being”
Open Dialogue	Creating an environment of open dialogue in class and modeling communication (in class) for the workplace (e.g., listening, empathy, dealing with tensions, balancing advocacy and enquiry)	“I see education as open discussion of things, I would try to keep it from becoming one sided discussion ... we are teaching how to think not what to think.... “
Interpersonal Understanding	Building deeper interpersonal understanding and skill between the leader and others (understanding associates or followers to motivate them, building stronger relationships in leadership)	“Where it almost always comes up is in leadership classes, when you're talking about how to motivate people. What you find a lot is that people are aligned with their faith”
Organizational	Benefits to the organization by creating a place people want to work and be part of.	“So all the classes I teach are about how do you maximize organizational fulfillment, how do you create organizational culture that's something that people want to be a part of, what kind of leaders do you want? ...

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		Spiritual beliefs ... are absolutely vital to get to that level because I think that's what people need to either challenge themselves ... [or] align what they really believe into the kind of leader or organization they want"
Ethical Leadership	Spirituality informs teaching about ethical leadership and provides a basis for ethical or moral decisions	"If you only have one word for leadership, that word must be integrity and so much of integrity is grounded in right-wrong, that takes us back to who I am, spirituality"
Source of Principles	Spirituality as a source for general teaching of self, leadership, or management principles (general leadership or management principles, sayings, 'ancient' wisdom, the golden rule).	"Also caring ... What is the most loving thing to do? I actually mention the Christian agape principle so they know what it is before they leave the management class. Christians don't have an exclusive right to this ..."
Ways of Knowing Truth	Teaching about epistemology and ontology by analyzing and exposing systems of thought and worldviews, beliefs about the nature of truth and the variety of belief systems that inform different perspectives (or worldviews)	"I think the benefits are opening the conceptual framework of both the students and instructors to the larger issues ... I start by teaching my students about the socially and existentially constructed nature of reality, there's no religion that can say this is absolutely true, you just can't do it, and it gets back into a belief system, which gets you back in questions of faith and meaning, which is far more important than a lot of the things we can empirically validate"

It is evident throughout many of the benefit codes that several instructors recognize a spiritual underpinning to various aspects of leadership and management education such as ethics, knowledge (the nature of worldviews and how this impacts the known and the knower), relationships and beliefs about relationships (e.g., how leaders interact with others with an emphasis on attitudes such as care and humility), and a leader's or follower's sense of purpose. This understanding of spirituality includes learning to lead or manage effectively in an environment where there are different spiritually based perspectives.

In summary, the benefits identified seemed to be either personal to the student or learner, pedagogical (classroom interaction, learning), or organizational (workplace, workplace relationships). Personal

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benefits to the instructor were not mentioned directly, except more in the frame of concerns where some participants mentioned instructors observed proselytizing to fulfill a personal desire or need (e.g., to comply with their own religious or spiritual beliefs). Benefits to the broader community or the educational institutions were also not raised, such as fulfilling a mission to develop students as whole individuals (e.g., see Strange & Rogers, 2011). These may be areas to explore in future studies.

5.2.2 Concerns and challenges.

Faculty participants mentioned eight types of challenges (see Table 3). These concerns or challenges include the possibility of students or faculty proselytizing and that of conflict, tension, or discomfort as a result of spiritual topics being included. Aligned with these concerns is the need to ensure common understanding of the term spirituality including any relationship to religion, and to support the use of these terms in class which may entail acknowledging different points of view on definitions. Bias against spirituality and religion was also mentioned where faculty acknowledged occasional negative attitudes encountered amongst students and faculty who would rather avoid the topic or are anti-spiritual or anti-organized religion.

Also, concerns related to the power differential between faculty and students were mentioned in terms of the instructor guarding against using power to suppress students' expression of their views. A few mentioned the challenge of topic balance or relevance in an already full curriculum, as the topic needs to be seen as relevant by students and faculty in relation to other topics. Lack of facilitation skill was also mentioned, sometimes through examples of peer faculty who lacked skill or confidence in facilitating discussion when the topic of spirituality arose. All the faculty interviewed seemed open to the discussion of spirituality despite the stated concerns. Several noted that often such discussions naturally take place outside of the classroom in private conversations or assignments. Although open to this discussion (especially if student initiated) about half of sample did not include a significant explicit spiritual theme in their current course or did not express the intention to expand the role of spirituality in their courses. Other salient themes are included in the table below.

Table 3. Concerns or challenges themes, descriptions and quotes.

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Theme	Description	Example Quote
Proselytizing	Evangelical, proselytizing, or zealous students or faculty (pushing or stuck in one point of view, viewing one way as superior, trying to convince others, using religious or spiritual authorities or literature inappropriately in the academic context)	“As soon as you say <i>spirituality</i> people think you’re talking about religion, [and are] afraid of argument or afraid of someone trying to proselytize them”
Power	The instructor power differential (silencing students from expressing discomfort, disagreement, or choice).	“There’s positional power you have as professor so some students may be offended and not speak up if they disagree”
Tension or Conflict	Tensions or conflicts arising (inflammatory topic in group context, conflicts anticipated or experienced between different religions or worldviews).	“In a previous class I had one student who flew into a rage”
Discomfort	Individual discomfort with the topic (hot buttons, causing defensiveness, counter cultural to discuss religion, hard to talk about, own discomfort or awkwardness with topic, both student’s and faculty’s discomfort).	“But the other barrier – someone who has very strong feelings who is vocal, that shuts down discussion or increases the discomfort among the students”
Lack of Instructor Facilitation Skill	Lack of instructor skill or knowledge (ability to facilitate discussion on topic).	“I’ve heard from students ... they would really like to discuss spirituality in the classes but they feel faculty are wholly untrained to facilitate those kinds of conversation because ... you really have to take yourself out of it and they feel a lot of faculty can’t facilitate something like that so they shut it off or steer away from it”
Topic Relevance and Balance	Questions of topic relevance and balance (faculty or students questioning the role of the topic in curriculum, time consumed relative to other topics, staying on course topic, time needed to build trust and properly explore a sensitive topic).	“Or taking too much time, which I would intellectually prefer to do that, but I can’t as there are other themes and concepts that have to be covered in a 10 week course, so I just bring these up as thoughts and hope others will do more to explore it”
Anti-Spirituality	Anti-religious or anti-spiritual sentiment by students or faculty (purposeful exclusion of spirituality or religion from the academic context, negative sentiment toward religion or spirituality in general or toward a specific religion or spirituality).	“I am not one of those positivistic professors who acts in anti-religious way of being ...”

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Misunderstanding Terms	Meaning or inclusion of terms (potential misunderstanding, lack of understanding, or different understanding of key terms like spirituality or religion).	“Well unfortunately it [ended up] being an argument of words and the word was not defined very well. So there was extensive argumentativeness around the issues that surround it because the word did not get defined”
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Many of the codes we identified focused on how differences in religion or spirituality are experienced more generally in society (e.g., tensions or conflicts that predate and exist outside of the classroom). For example, participants mentioned that “the college makes it uncomfortable to acknowledge your faith” and that individual students and faculty who had negative experiences with other belief systems or with organized religion are reticent about the topic being raised in the classroom. This included negative sentiment related to the separation of church and state in government and public education. There is, however, potential for students to revisit these tensions and explore new attitudes to religious and spiritual issues in the classroom. Another theme in the concerns was discomfort or tensions that could occur or be amplified because of what happens *in the* classroom between faculty and students (e.g., lack of instructor skill in facilitating discussion, abuse of faculty’s role and power in the classroom). These discomforts and tensions might be moderated by instructor’s teaching methods.

The eight codes highlight some of the problems and challenges that faculty encounter when including spiritual topics. Many of the concerns and challenges noted above lead logically to the methods and principles that faculty then recommended for including spiritual topics in graduate classes, which are discussed in the next section.

5.2.3 Teaching methods and principles.

Participants emphasized that careful planning of instruction (including choosing resources and activities and having clear course goals) and skillful facilitation (e.g. setting ground rules for discussion, redirecting conversation) were key principles for including spirituality (see Table 4). The instructor’s competence in engaging student reactions to the topic and personal viewpoints was identified as a skill distinct from the general instructional skill code. This ability appears to support students in articulating their experiences, contemplating their reactions, and keeps the class moving forward on a particularly sensitive topic. The

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open discussion code includes setting a tone for the class and ensuring that all feel welcome, which is appropriate to the non-sectarian or multi-faith context. Using cultural materials and experiences (e.g. plays, poetry, music) was often discussed as a segue to the topic of spirituality to everyday experienced living. In addition, the *links to practice* code emphasizes making it clear how discussions of spiritual topics are relevant to the workplace.

Participants also discussed the importance of choosing an instructional approach, describing two main approaches: a planned, structured inclusion with resources and activities, and an emergent approach that allows spirituality to emerge organically as a topic with students choosing when and how they address it. Indeed, most mentioned that they prefer to let the spirituality emerge organically, that is, be brought up in class discussion by the students, although several included readings that would prompt such discussion. In addition to the structured versus emergent approaches, it was also evident that faculty need to recognize, and perhaps choose (or let students choose), the language to be used in class discussions. The participants described an explicit approach in which terms like religion and spirituality are defined and directly discussed, and a more implicit approach using more generic terms such as meaning, values, and ethics without explicit discussion of spiritual topics. There seemed to be a sense that the explicit naming of spiritualities and religious (or non-religious) belief systems might be both more precise and more volatile while the implicit use of terms such as values and ethics might be perceived as more inclusive and yet vague or less precise.

Table 4. Methods and principles themes, descriptions and quotes.

Theme	Description	Example Quote
Respected Resources	Use literature or readings (help students become familiar with terms, get comfortable with topic before class, using guest speakers or quotations from successful leaders to establish relevance and importance, choose literature most students can identify with, that contributes an intellectual framework for discussion).	“A list of readings with spirituality components would be a start; having a literature base with spirituality component related to your field, and you could build those in because they are related to what you’re doing ... blind peer reviewed pieces as opposed to, say, [popular US evangelical Christian writer’s name mentioned]”

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Links to Practice	Links the classroom learning to leadership practice (how to, working with diversity).	“In order to understand management, you have to understand people, in order to understand people, you have to understand what turns them on, and what motivates them and what is important to them and that has a deep spiritual connection”
Ground Rules	Creating initial classroom conditions to support discussion (rules or principles in student handbook or syllabus, prepare students with skills, e.g. advocacy and inquiry)	“I’m very attentive to creating a ... safe culture of mutual respect. The norms we’re going to use are identified in the beginning and together and support everything we’re going to do together. You can’t have learning unless people feel safe, so from the moment a class begins, there’s attention to creating a culture, community of learners grounded in mutual respect”
Skillful Facilitation	Skillfully teaching and facilitating (draw the line where lack of respect, redirect discussion, promote thoughtful discussion)	“It requires me as a faculty to really pay attention to really subtle cues, harder online than in the classroom, so it doesn’t become a tinder box but that it sparks great discussion and gets people thinking about their life, their work, their goals, their gifts. And that’s where I think it’s really beneficial.”
Purposeful Approach	Make stylistic choices about how to include spiritual or religious topics (emergent and loose inclusion vs. preplanned and structured inclusion, explicit and direct vs. implicit and indirect, inclusion via generic labels like values or ethics, self-revealing approach versus neutral participation approach for faculty and students).	“I would go with ... something that is quite emergent, that just follows the group. It would be a loose design, but starting with the notion that this can be problematic, but also has the opportunity to be really beneficial.”
Clarify Goals	Clarify course goals (what conversations are intended, purpose of discussion, time allocated, balance with other topics).	“So what I try to do is use case studies that bring spirituality in that bring out how this applies in the workplace ... a case study of someone who did something or as something that happened in the workplace and how would you deal with it as a manager. So the task isn’t to say I am this or that, but when faced with this situation, what action might I take... In a secular institution it’s important to tie it directly to the curriculum to make it meaningful to the curriculum as a whole”

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Define Terms	Define key terms (meaning of words like spirituality).	“You have to define it. So when you say spiritual - you want to include spiritual discussion in the classroom. You have to define it. What is it that you really want to include ... It’s a tricky word. It’s probably why other universities rather focus on values and ethics. First principle – define and describe it and what you’re looking for from the students. Maybe even examples of conversations that are okay, versus examples of conversations that are not okay”
Open Discussion	Create an open environment for discussion (inclusivity, multiple viewpoints, respect for differences and religious freedom, all welcome).	“Create a principle or policy that says that all faiths or views are welcome. The student will not be expected to adopt any one. You’d have to let people know that everything is welcome and you are not going to be forced to accept any one point of view”
Explore Reactions	Explore student reactions (what’s going on for you, tell me about how you see the topic).	“So when I had that situation, I think the student was an atheist, so I said, tell us about atheism, how do I make this situation as open to you as to others and their beliefs ...”
Allow Choices	Allow student classroom and assignment choices (make topic an elective, allow choices in level of participation, allow choices in assignments).	“I would discourage any test in this area. Leave the assignments open – let the students self-select and see if the students come up with something to do with spirituality. Maybe bring it up to faculty to form a study group – so students can self-elect and maybe that will open up to a full course where students with focus on spirituality”
Connect to Culture	Use plays, movies, music, stories, poetry (cultural experience show connection between beliefs and leadership).	“I use poetry in virtually every classroom setting, I find poetry to be grounded in concepts of spirituality”

The discussion of methods and principles had themes of student freedom, respect for others, relevance, clarity of instructional purpose, and teaching skill. Interestingly, many of the identified methods and principles align with adult learning principles, such as allowing learners to be self-directed (allowing choices, open discussion), providing immediate real-world application (links to practice), and clarifying reasons for learning a topic (purposeful approach, clarify goals) (Knowles, Holston, & Swanson, 2012). It

stands to reason that with graduate students in leadership and management programs being predominantly working adults, they want to make their own choices and explore their own way, which undoubtedly includes choices they make about spiritual and religious issues and how they express choices in their leadership or management and in their learning. Andragogical principles also emphasize the negative impact of fear and anxiety on learning, suggesting the need to provide clarity on the role of spiritual topics and avoid a fear or anxiety inducing learning environment.

6. Discussion and conclusion

The implications for faculty in multi-faith environments are several. Our participants mentioned a similar number of benefits and challenges which we think indicates that they are interested but cautious about including topics related to spirituality. Most participants did not mention having a separate unit or module on spirituality; rather discussions of spirituality usually were related to topics covered in the curriculum such as communication, ethics, and diversity as in the two narratives. By integrating it in this way, curricular space is not used for the additional topic, and students can discuss it as they see the need. This is also supported by the theme of links to practice, where students and faculty seek the practical relevance of spiritual topics. But this sort of student choice almost presupposes a class environment that encourages students to bring up what many clearly feel are sensitive topics. However, a few instructors mentioned a specific course, class, or part of a class dedicated to talking about the role of spirituality in leadership and management, representing a more explicit approach similar to Delbecq (2010), Pielstick (2005), and Strange and Rogers (2011).

Both the narratives gave some hint of skilled facilitation of the potentially sensitive topic so that the ensuing discussion was “safe” and insightful. How does a “safe” class environment happen? Part of skilled facilitation is the ability to define the topic in an inclusive way so that all students can in some way relate to it or at least not feel excluded; then, giving students choices about how to participate and at what level to participate is important (e.g. not requiring revelation of personal beliefs). Guided reflection, as described by Roberts (2008), can include personal journals or discussion to build “collaborative

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reflective skills” (p. 121), which can allow for individual freedom. Faculty should address ground rules, terms, and the purpose of discussion of spirituality so that the ties to the professional literature and to practice (e.g. the diverse workplace) are evident. The instructor’s respectful inquiry, as narrative two points out, seems to be not only a key class discussion facilitation skill, but as modeling behavior it is also an important technique to promote facilitation skill acquisition for leaders.

It is evident that some of the themes identified in this study were already acknowledged in the literature such as the value of “engaging in the messy and contentious discussions of spirituality, faith, and religion” to develop skills in interacting with respect about sensitive issues (Stonecipher, 2012, p. 94).

However, many of the themes in the areas of benefits, challenges, and methods and principles were not well represented in the literature, such as the challenge of instructors’ lack of facilitation skills. Indeed there is an underlying theme of the importance of facilitation skills for developing leaders and for instructors. Whether in the classroom or in the workplace, leaders need the ability to discuss sensitive issues about which there are many strongly held beliefs and which impact attitudes and behaviors.

It is interesting to note that the participants did not directly oppose the inclusion of spirituality; rather they expressed concerns regarding the manner in which spirituality is included. Instructors’ styles of inclusion varied along the dimensions of explicit versus implicit and organic-emergent versus preplanned-structured approaches. Many of the participants appeared to support the inclusion of spirituality, but they preferred a subtle or emergent inclusion (e.g. waiting for the topic to arise on its own). This preference for emergent inclusion may reflect the curricula they taught that did not include spirituality. Those that explicitly included spiritual topics seemed to have the personality, experience, and attitude to support this inclusion without offending (e.g. “I have never heard of students ... complaining ... but I think it’s because they know I respect them ... they have to define and seek their own truth and whatever that is I may not agree with it, but I’ll respect it, and that’s what I want to do for them”). Several participants noted that spirituality was not included in the curriculum nor in the class syllabus, but that they were open about their own worldview or spiritual perspective (often in an initial class meeting) with students and

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invited students to be open, too, encouraging the expression of different viewpoints. This represents an explicit addressing of spirituality on the personal level initially in the class (but not in the curriculum) coupled with an emergent inclusion which allowed students to bring spirituality into any discussion. As one participant explained, such introductory statements of the instructor “gave spirituality permission to speak” in the various topics covered in the class. This seemed to us like a personal stylistic choice more than a best practice. These different approaches to inclusion, from emergent to pre-planned and from implicit to explicit, may warrant further exploration and elaboration. Waggoner (2011) and Lentz’s (2011) discussions of including spirituality in higher education could explain a preference for an implicit approach where faculty are hesitant about including a controversial topic in classes (e.g. fearing ridicule by other faculty, misunderstandings of US Constitutional implications on teaching regarding spirituality and religion).

A number of insights regarding methods and principles for including spiritual topics in courses were also derived from the interviews, many relating to existing best practices in adult education. The well-recited adult learning principles include that adults (a) bring extensive life and professional experience to the learning task; (b) tend to be self-directed and (c) goal oriented; (d) value relevance and (e) practical application; and (f) desire to be respected (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2012). So, for example, clarifying class or course goals for adult learners to see the relevance of such topics is important. The general learning outcomes of a course including spiritual topics might be less obvious to students than, for example, a course in statistics or labor law, because of the varying meanings and connotations of the word spirituality. Instructors need to be clear on learning outcomes, definitions of terms, ground rules for student-student and student-faculty engagement, and most other potentially problematic aspects of designing and delivering such a class. Also, adult learners want to be respected by their peers and by the instructor. Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2012) note that adults “resent and resist situations in which they feel others are imposing their wills on them” (p. 63). Ground rules established early in the class that

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facilitate what Hicks (2010) calls respectful pluralism along with skilled facilitation of the potentially volatile discussion are closely aligned with the principles of adult teaching and learning.

Many of the principles, challenges, and benefits highlighted in this study can provide interested faculty with practical, process-orientated guidelines, and practices for planning and teaching. The methods and principles suggested by the participants (see Table 4) could be a foundation for instructional guidelines with adjustment for the classroom context, the university culture, and the characteristics of the faculty and students. One example of a guideline or best practice would be to create initial classroom conditions to support discussion through the establishment of ground rules (principles) in the student handbook, the syllabus, or in class through facilitated discussion.

This study has several limitations. We recognize that those who were gracious enough to participate may be somewhat open to discussing the inclusion of spiritual topics, although participants expressed varying levels of concern or reservations about whether to include or how to include spirituality. We did not specifically seek out or encounter the opinions of those openly hostile to the idea – which could be the focus of a future study. Also, while these findings provide insight into the perspectives of leadership and management faculty in multi-faith graduate programs, transferring the findings from this exploratory study should be done thoughtfully and tentatively. This study may prompt additional research with larger samples or studies focusing on specific teaching methods, principles, or contexts. This study, following the structure that emerged in our previous study (Allen & Williams, 2015) focused on benefits, challenges, and methods, but future studies could include additional aspects of faculty perspectives including factors such as personal interest and confidence in including spiritual topics. A similar study could be conducted to explore the experiences of undergraduate leadership faculty or student affairs staff teaching younger students who are engaged in self-discovery and exploration. Further study could yield additional insight to enrich the education of leaders and managers who will work in spiritually diverse global environments.

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