

# Spiritual Leadership within An Army Acquisition Program Management Context

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*Although the leadership style of a program manager effects the success of the project (Muller & Turner, 2007), unfortunately, the typical program manager primarily focuses on project cost, schedule and performance constraints. Since program management leadership is often overlooked, this generates the question on what types of leadership may be effective. Consequently, a qualitative study was conducted to examine the possible appropriateness of spiritual leadership within the Department of the Army acquisition program management context since the characteristics of spiritual leadership as described by Fry (2003) engenders calling and membership leading to the outcomes of organizational commitment and productivity.*

## INTRODUCTION

Within the Department of Defense (DOD), the management and execution of acquisition programs occurs under the supervision of program managers (PMs) that oversee multiple integrated product teams (IPTs) that develop, procure and sustain modernized equipment for the United States military (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (OUSD), 1998a). The IPT is a multidisciplinary team established with a designated team leader by the responsible program manager (OUSD, 1998a). Based on the fact that program management processes are complex and multi-functional (Ng & Walker, 2008), IPT leaders are not experts in every phase of their acquisition programs (OUSD, 1998b). Consequently, to achieve team goals leaders must rely on expertise from team members by establishing a collaborative team environment between team members that results in the product leader being more of a “social architect” to orchestrate group activities (Stagnaro & Piotrowski, 2013, p. 224). Furthermore, team success is significantly impacted by leadership external to the team (Hoch & Dulebohn, 2013) that is provided by the program manager.

Stagnaro and Piotrowski (2013) noted that the basis for performance within a program management context is the type of behaviors portrayed by the leader. To facilitate the success of the IPT leaders, supportive coaching from PMs is required that provides motivation and consultation in areas where the team requires external assistance (Hackman & Walton, 1986). To achieve success, PMs must integrate stakeholders into the process, build teams, and generate a balanced equanimous leadership environment through shared decision-making (Johnson, Boucher, Connors, & Robinson, 2001). PMs can attain this through effective leadership that provides clear directions, and motivates organizational members (Johnson et al., 2001).

Although the leadership style of the PM effects the success of the project (Muller & Turner, 2007), unfortunately, the typical PM primarily focuses on program cost, schedule and performance constraints.

Consequently, PM leadership is often overlooked, which generates questions on what types of leadership may be effective in supporting successful IPTs within the DOD acquisition program management context.

Although there are many different types of leadership paradigms, based on the characteristics of spiritual leadership, which engenders calling and membership leading to the outcomes of organizational commitment and productivity, it is posited that spiritual leadership may be an appropriate style of leadership for PMs. As a result, a study on spiritual leadership within an acquisition program management context within the Department of the Army was conducted.

A qualitative study methodology was selected for this study since Fornaciari and Dean (2001) suggested that additional research on spiritual leadership should include in-depth studies using qualitative techniques. Nicolae, Ion, and Nicolae (2013) recommended that additional research is still required to overcome knowledge deficiencies, and strengthen model development that has resulted from nascent empirical research despite the fact that over the last decade empirical research has been conducted on Fry's (2003) spiritual leadership theory. Consequently, a qualitative study using thematic analysis was conducted on the leadership of a successful PM that focused on his leadership experiences and perceptions using the characteristics of the spiritual leadership theory (Fry, 2003; Fry, Vitucci, & Cedillo, 2005) as a guide. The study was performed using an open ended in-depth semi-structured interview (Patton, 2002) to address the following research question: Can a successful PM portray spiritual leadership characteristics?

Presented is an overview of the spiritual leadership theory, the study methodology, the research results, and a discussion of the results based on the leadership experiences and perceptions of a successful PM. The discussion illustrates how spiritual leadership may be a suitable means of providing external leadership to integrated product development teams within the Department of the Army's acquisition program management community.

## **SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP THEORY**

Spiritual leadership is one of several ethical positivistic leadership theories (Yukl, 2013). Spiritual leadership theory is based on leaders providing a vision that generates a sense of calling and creating an organizational culture of altruistic love that engenders a sense of membership and appreciation within followers or employees (Fry, 2003). Fry (2003) contended that when employees' lives have meaning and they feel their efforts make a difference, it produces "a sense of calling" (p. 711). This sense of calling is generated from the congruence of the leader's organizational vision with the employees' personal goals and values (Fry, 2003). Kotter (1996) posited that vision provides a shared view of the future that motivates employee efforts to work to build the future. This vision inspires hope and faith (Daft & Lengel, 1998; Nanus, 1992) that Fry (2003) contended is the basis for the belief that the organization will achieve its mission.

Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003) pointed out that employees desire to discover work's meaning and to be part of a group that appreciates members' contributions. Fry (2003) maintained that employees feel a sense of membership when the organization's culture is centered on altruistic love. The definition of altruistic love within spiritual leadership is "a sense of wholeness, harmony, and well-being produced through care, concern, and appreciation for both self and others" (Fry, 2003, p. 712). Altruism includes the following values: "patience, kindness, lack of envy, forgiveness, humility, selflessness, self-control, trust, loyalty, and truthfulness" (Fry, 2003, p. 712). Psychology has shown that love can overturn the adverse effects of fear, anger, pride, and a sense of failure (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Furthermore, Fleischman (1994) and Maddock and Fulton (1998) maintained that the two critical requirements for spiritual survival in the workplace provided by spiritual leadership are the sense of calling and membership in an appreciative group. The ultimate results of spiritual leadership that supports employees' spiritual survival was posited to be organizational commitment (Fry, 2003), productivity and continuous improvement (Fairholm, 1998).

Fry (2003) contended that the communication of core values by leaders through their vision and authentic behaviors will motivate team members. Spiritual leadership generates "a sense of spiritual

survival” within the members by providing them with a sense of “calling and membership” (Fry, 2003, p. 693). Fry (2003) posited that spiritual leaders construct a vision that provides a means to inculcate leader and organizational values within “empowered teams” that generates increased organizational commitment and productivity within those teams (p. 693).

## **METHODOLOGY**

A qualitative study was conducted by examining the leadership experiences and perceptions of a PM, who served as a purposeful extreme theoretical-based (Patton, 2002) unit of analysis. The PM was purposely selected as the study’s unit of analysis for the interview since he was the leader of the only organization within the particular program executive office (PEO) whose annual climate survey indicated that his members’ organizational commitment was significantly higher than the Army and the PEO’s average organizational commitment score. Furthermore, the PM was selected as the interview subject since he had a reputation of portraying a positivistic leadership style that had attracted unsolicited individuals from other program management offices to request to join the PM’s organization. Consequently, it was anticipated that an interview with the PM might reveal information about his core values, leadership philosophy and behaviors required to address the study’s research question.

Using the characteristics from the spiritual leadership theory, the study examined in depth the PM’s leadership experiences to capture a wealth of detailed information that would not be provided through a quantitative study (Patton, 2002). Since leadership is an experiential phenomenon of the leaders’ influence on their followers (Yukl, 2013), a thematic analysis of the leadership experiences and perceptions was conducted from the PM’s perspective to see if the analysis of the interview transcript would provide information that might suggest that the PM portrayed spiritual leadership characteristics. A thematic analysis was also conducted to understand the impact of the PM’s leadership on his organization and subordinates.

Since studies that rely solely on interviews with senior executives can be prone to provide unconscious inflated perceptions of leader actions and behaviors (Conger, 1998), a focus group interview with one of the study subject’s subordinate IPTs was also conducted. Although the interview was primarily focused on the team’s group dynamics, it included an open-ended discussion on team member perceptions of the PM’s leadership on the acquisition product development team and its members.

### **Data Collection**

Since a thematic analysis was planned to interpret the description of the leadership experience from the perspective of the study participants, the study began with an interview with the PM, who was the study’s subject of interest based on his organization’s unexpectedly high organizational commitment obtained during the recent climate survey. A voluntary confidential face-to-face interview was conducted after the PM was provided a full disclosure of the research intent (Qu & Dumay, 2011). The interview used open-ended semi-fixed questions to capture the PM’s leadership experiences and perceptions.

The semi-structured interview methodology was employed in the study since it enabled the researcher the ability to tailor the interview to put the participant at ease (Cachia & Millward, 2011) while providing a framework to ensure that leadership characteristics were addressed during the interviews (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Unlike structured interviews, the semi-structured interview provides the flexibility to explore unexpected issues raised by the participant (Cachia & Millward, 2011). During this study, the PM unexpectedly identified the uniqueness of his members’ organizational commitment, which the researcher was able to explore since the semi-structured interview process was employed.

Spiritual leadership is an experience that is based on eight characteristics. These are: core values, vision, faith and hope, altruism, meaning and calling, membership, organizational commitment, and productivity (Fry, 2003; Fry et al., 2005). These eight characteristics were evaluated through the 19 open ended questions contained in the interview guide in table 1. Questions 1-2, 4-5, 8-9, 12, 14-19 in the interview guide provided indicators on the respondent’s possible display of the characteristics of a spiritual leader. Questions 3, 6-7, 10-11, 13, and 17-19 in the interview guide provided indicators on the

possible impact of the respondent’s leadership on his organization and direct reports. The thematic analysis (Hartman & Conklin, 2012) of the PM’s answers to the interview guide questions from table 1 provided during the audio taped semi-structured interview were used to assess the study question.

**TABLE 1**  
**INTERVIEW GUIDE – SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP**

Characteristic	Questions
Core values	1. Could you please describe your core values? 2. What is the source of your core values? 3. How have your core values impacted your leadership?
Vision	4. What is your vision for your organization? 5. What is the source of your vision? 6. What is the impact of your vision on your leadership? 7. What is the impact of your vision on your direct reports?
Faith & hope	8. What do you have faith and hope in? 9. What is the source of your faith and hope? 10. What role does faith and hope have on your leadership? 11. What is the impact of your faith and hope on your organization?
Altruism	12. What role does altruism play in your leadership? 13. What is the impact of altruism on your leadership?
Meaning & calling	14. What does your job mean to you? 15. How has your leadership influenced your direct reports’ feelings about their jobs?
Membership	16. How would you describe your organization? 17. How has your leadership affected the direct reports’ feelings about the organization?
Organizational Commitment	18. How has your leadership effected your direct report’s organizational commitment?
Productivity	19. How has your leadership had an impact on the productivity of your direct reports and teams?

The study also included the collection of data from a focus group of subordinates who were part of an IPT overseen by the PM. The interview included one open-ended question on the PM’s leadership that provided significant insights that supported the perceptions on the leadership experiences described by the PM in his interview. The focus-group discussed the following question related to the PM’s leadership: what support is provided by external leadership to your product development team?

### **Data Analysis**

The study employed thematic analysis (Hartman & Conklin, 2012) to analyze the data on the leadership experiences and perceptions of the PM. Thematic analysis provided a methodology to interpret the information (Hartman & Conklin, 2012) from the transcription of the recorded interview with the PM. Thematic analysis is a process that analyzes the qualitative information by identifying a code (Hartman & Conklin, 2012), which is a word or phrase, that captures the essence of the meaning of each of the segments of interview transcription text (Saldana, 2013). These codes were analyzed to identify patterns, which were grouped as themes (Boyatzis, 1998). Themes are “a pattern found in the information that at minimum describes and organizes the possible observations and at a maximum interprets aspects of the

phenomenon” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 4). Using this process, PM replies to open-ended interview questions were converted into thematic variables that were analyzed (Boyatzis, 2011) to determine the essence of the PM’s leadership experiences and the existence of evidence to address the study’s research question.

Initial coding was conducted for this study on the interview transcript, which was validated by the study subject, using primarily *in vivo* coding. *In vivo* coding is a short quotation from the transcript (Saldana, 2013). Only where the *in vivo* code could not be adequately understood outside of its spoken context, descriptive coding was employed (Saldana, 2013). Descriptive coding abridges the essence of the data segment into a word or short phrase (Saldana, 2013). After combining similar *in vivo* codes, like “empowers” and “empowered” into one descriptive code, 121 initial codes were identified. These initial codes were consolidated and clustered into related coded data using pattern coding (Saldana, 2013) that identified 62 categories, which are “meaningful and parsimonious units of analysis” (Saldana, 2013, p. 210). These categories were further analyzed using axial coding to identify the interrelationships between the categories (Saldana, 2013). Using a process known as “themeing the data” (Saldana, 2013, p. 175) an analysis of the integration patterns of the categories generated nine themes. These themes were further analyzed to determine the pattern interfaces, which were used to create the study’s operational model diagram (Saldana, 2013) that depicted the essence of the PM’s leadership experiences and perceptions.

The focus group responses to the open-ended question about the PM’s leadership was also analyzed using a thematic analysis. This analysis captured the essence of the subordinate’s perceptions of the behaviors and actions of the PM as they related to the team and its members.

### **Validity and Reliability**

The validity of a qualitative study is based on the data being interpreted correctly (Kirk & Miller, 1986). The reliability is based on “the degree to which the finding is independent of accidental circumstances of the research” (Kirk & Miller, 1986, p.20). The trustworthiness or rigor of the study involves credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). The rigor of this study was based on several factors. The study included the PM’s review of the interview transcript to ensure its accuracy, and the first coding of the transcript primarily used *in vivo* coding to minimize potential investigator bias. Only in instances where an *in vivo* code would not be understood outside of the context of the transcript, the researcher used descriptive coding (Saldana, 2013) to augment *in vivo* coding. To ensure the credibility of the study results, a triangulation of multiple second coding methods (Flick, 2004) was employed to generate the categories and themes using the rigorous thematic analysis process (Boyatzis, 1998). The second coding used a combination of pattern and axial coding, and the “themeing the data” process that produced an operational model diagram that depict the interrelationships of the themes (Saldana, 2013, p. 175). Lastly, the draft study report, without the interview comments and perceptions of the focus group, was reviewed by the PM to ensure that the categories and themes accurately depicted the PM’s viewpoints on his leadership characteristics. The focus group interview transcript was also reviewed by the subordinate IPT leader to ensure that it accurately depicted perceptions of the team. The results of the focus group interview were used to corroborate the PM’s viewpoints on his leadership characteristics.

## **RESULTS**

The thematic qualitative study was conducted on the PM, whose organization had a significantly higher organizational commitment than the Army or PEO average, to understand if this PM’s success can be attributed to his possible portrayal of spiritual leadership characteristics. An open-ended semi-structured interview was conducted with the PM using a questionnaire based on the eight characteristics derived from Fry’s (2003) spiritual leadership theory. The results include: a description of the study sample with the presentation of a demographical depiction of the study’s unit of analysis and focus group interview participants, and a description of the codified themes from the interview transcripts. The study results also included a presentation of the focus group’s perceptions of the PM’s leadership behaviors, which corroborated many of the PM’s interview responses.

## Sample

The study consisted of an interview with a purposeful extreme theoretical-based sample that consisted of the PM. The PM was in his fifties. He had 27 years of leadership experience that included 20 years in program management at various levels. He had been leading his current program management office, which he established, for the last three and one half years. The mission of the PM's current organization was to conduct the research, development, test and evaluation, procurement, and life cycle support for military equipment for the Department of the Army. The PM led an organization with 22 subordinates, who were divided into three different teams.

A focus group interview was also conducted with eight of the PM's subordinates from one of his three teams. The focus group consisted of four men and four women. The ages of the participants ranged from 23 to 60 with the majority of the participants in their thirties. Most of the participants had been assigned to the organization between one and two years; which provided them time to not only view the PM's behaviors and actions but also formulate opinions based on their perceptions.

## Themes

The thematic analysis of 62 categories generated nine themes. These themes included: core values, vision, faith and hope, trust in people, altruism, calling and meaning, membership, organizational commitment, and productivity.

### *Core Values*

The PM's (personal communication, February 2, 2015) core values were "integrity," and altruism, which he described as treating "others as you would like them to treat you, and love thy neighbor." These core values drove all his other "values and norms" (PM, 2015). The PM (2015) indicated that the source of his core values were his "Christian beliefs." His core values provided a "foundation" for his leadership (PM, 2015). His core values gave his leadership "balance" and resulted in inspiration, and motivation for his direct reports. The PM (2015) pointed out that leaders must balance "mission accomplishment" with meeting their "people's needs." The PM (2015) explained that his organizational members are inspired to "want to work for" him and are motivated to "push for your same goals" because a balanced approach results in member needs being addressed.

### *Vision*

The PM's (2015) vision was the "underlying foundation" for the organization activities" since it provided direction and guidance. It bounded and shaped the organization (PM, 2015). The vision kept the organization "within the guidelines and it pushes people in the right direction" (PM, 2015). The vision also let the organizational members "know what is important and the priority" (PM, 2015).

The PM's (2015) vision was derived from three different sources: higher headquarters, the external community, and the acquisition processes. The PM (2015) noted that for the vision to be viable it must be "nested with the larger organization." It was shaped through "understanding the community" that the organization operates within, which includes external stakeholders such as other agencies, the military departments, the combatant commanders and industry partners (PM, 2015). Furthermore, the vision was directly impacted by the PM's (2015) "understanding acquisition" processes, which includes "what works and what doesn't work."

The PM (2015) indicated that ensuring his organizational members understand his vision "is the most important thing" since it empowers his subordinates." The vision provided his direct reports with the "authority to do what they need to do" so that they do not have "to ask permission for everything" (PM, 2015).

### *Faith and Hope*

The PM (2015) indicated that his "faith and hope is God" based on his "strong Christian belief." His faith and hope provided him with a "positive attitude" that "filtrates down to the organization" (PM, 2015). Faith and hope provided the leader the "balance" to not only perform the mission but to "care

about others,” which included understanding his “peoples’ needs” and helping them “to meet their goals” (PM, 2015). Additionally, his faith and hope served as the basis for his ethics, which was “knowing what’s right and morally correct” that enables him to achieve his mission “without hurting someone else” (PM, 2015). These ethics provided the PM (2015) with the ability “to set the example for his people,” which stimulated organizational member trust in their leader.

#### *Trust in People*

The PM (2015) believed that it was important to trust his “people to do what they need to do” and “believe they can make it happen.” The PM’s (2015) trust in his organizational members provided them the freedom to be creative, which facilitated their growth and “achievements” that enhanced the organization’s effectiveness. The PM’s (2015) trust in his organizational members facilitated teamwork within the organization, which along with achievement increased team productivity.

#### *Altruism*

The PM’s (2015) altruistic behaviors included “care, concern, and appreciation for others.” The PM (2015) noted that leaders must “take good care” of their team “just like you would your family.” He indicated that he considered his organization as his “second family” (PM, 2015), which requires the leader to know his people and teams in order to understand “what their needs are” (PM, 2015).

The PM (2015) was concerned about the welfare of his people. By “being in touch” with them, the PM was able to identify when things are “a little out of whack” (PM, 2015). This enabled him to identify and correct problems, which made his teams more efficient and effective (PM, 2015).

The PM also believed that it was important to express “appreciation” to organizational members for their contributions to the organization (PM, 2015). The PM (2015) indicated that this was accomplished by providing recognition for accomplishments not only through rewards and increased compensation but also by “a pat on the back.”

The PM (2015) indicated that his altruistic leadership resulted in changed attitudes in his people and their job satisfaction. When people are appreciated it results in a “change in their attitude” based on reduced stress that comes from the lack of needing to worry about the boss’ view of their job performance (PM, 2015). The changed attitude, which is “kind of like weight taken off their shoulders,” resulted in changed organizational member behaviors (PM, 2015). Instead of worrying about their job status, employees are able “to make [their] priority getting the job accomplished” (PM, 2015). Additionally, altruistic leadership provided the organizational members with “a good feeling that they like where they work, and they like what they do” (PM, 2015).

#### *Calling and Meaning*

The program management job provided the PM with a mission that generated “a sense of satisfaction” that his efforts were making a difference as he achieved his vision to get equipment needed to support the warfighters (PM, 2015). The PM (2015) indicated that the example he portrays and how he feels about the mission helps to unify the organization, since they result in “the organization having everybody believe in one thing and accomplishing a common goal.” This resulted in organizational “synergy,” which strengthened the organization (PM, 2015).

#### *Membership*

The PM’s (2015) organization could be described as “very collegial, trusting, caring; it’s almost like a family.” The PM (2015) indicated that the positive organizational culture was

cross team, . . . which is really unique because I have been in a lot of organizations where you may have one good team, but they focus just on their team. But our organization is different. . . our office sometimes takes work home with them and bring people over to their house to all work together almost like you did in college days as a study group. I have never seen that in any other organization.

The PM (2015) indicated his organization's culture was based on "caring about the warfighter, and getting the job done." The PM (2015) pointed out, that the culture also had "to do with caring about your fellow team worker." The PM (2015) noted that the organizational members were "truly like close friends; they care about each other." The organizational members feel "they have a supporting role to each other and the organization, and they are tied together like a chemical bond" (PM, 2015).

The PM (2015) pointed out that the organization culture, which provided a sense of "family," has resulted in employee job satisfaction. The PM (2015) noted that "the people who work here like this organization for what it is and they feel comfortable working here." Because of this new members have been attracted to the organization (PM, 2015). The PM (2015) pointed out that "instead of trying to find a way out of this organization, most people would like to find a way in."

The PM (2015) indicated that the organizational culture was based on a combination of "the people that were hired" and how leadership treats the organizational members. The PM (2015) stated that people were hired based on their "personalities." They were not only "go getters and doers" but "people who work well together" (PM, 2015). Furthermore, the PM (2015) noted that when leadership treats "everybody fairly" and treats "everybody the same," this facilitates teamwork and engenders a "climate of appreciation." The PM (2015) also pointed out that his organization was established after the arrival of new leadership at the PEO, which changed the culture of autocracy to a communicative and supportive culture that encouraged and facilitated the success of subordinate program management offices. The PM (2013) posited that this cultural change supported him in "creating something different" and enabled him to take his organization "to the next level."

#### *Organizational Commitment*

The PM (2015) noted that he led the organization by setting "the vision and" providing "guidance." He provided "the foundation" for a positive organizational climate by setting the example, which "infiltrates down to the rest of the organization" (PM, 2015). This has resulted in organizational member job satisfaction based on their sense of membership, which has enhanced their commitment to the organization (PM, 2015). The members "good feeling" about the organization has also attracted new members to the organization based on the organizations sense of family (PM, 2015).

#### *Productivity*

The PM's (2015) organization has been very effective in meeting goals. This is because the organization "works very well together" (PM, 2015). This teamwork can be attributed to the satisfaction and commitment of the organizational members (PM, 2013). The PM (2015) pointed out that the program management office is a growing entrepreneurial organization in an austere budget constrained environment. "To have this kind of success in this type of budget climate is almost impossible," which is "proof in the pudding of productivity" (PM, 2015). The PM (2015) also stated that "I think our organization is one of the most efficient and effective organizations that I have seen in my 27 year career. I am very proud of the people and very honored to work here."

#### **Focus Group Perceptions on the PM's Leadership**

The focus group noted that the PM provided great support to the acquisition product development team. Instead of being autocratic, the PM listened to people's concerns (team leader, personal communication, April 14, 2015). The PM did not admonish the team for being honest and open about issues (deputy team leader, personal communication, April 14, 2015). This was because the PM valued everyone "no matter what their level is" (test engineer, personal communication, April 14, 2015). Additionally, the PM put "people first;" he was always concerned about their emotional wellbeing due to the associated project related stressors (team leader, 2015). Rather than being insulated, the PM was engaged with his people (test engineer, 2015). Furthermore, the PM empowered his people by giving them the freedom to execute (lead test engineer, personal communication, April 14, 2015). The lead test engineer (2015) noted that "I have liberties to execute without constantly having to check in." Finally, the

lead system engineer (personal communication, April 14, 2015) pointed out that “the number one thing I appreciate from management” is when they “have your back.”

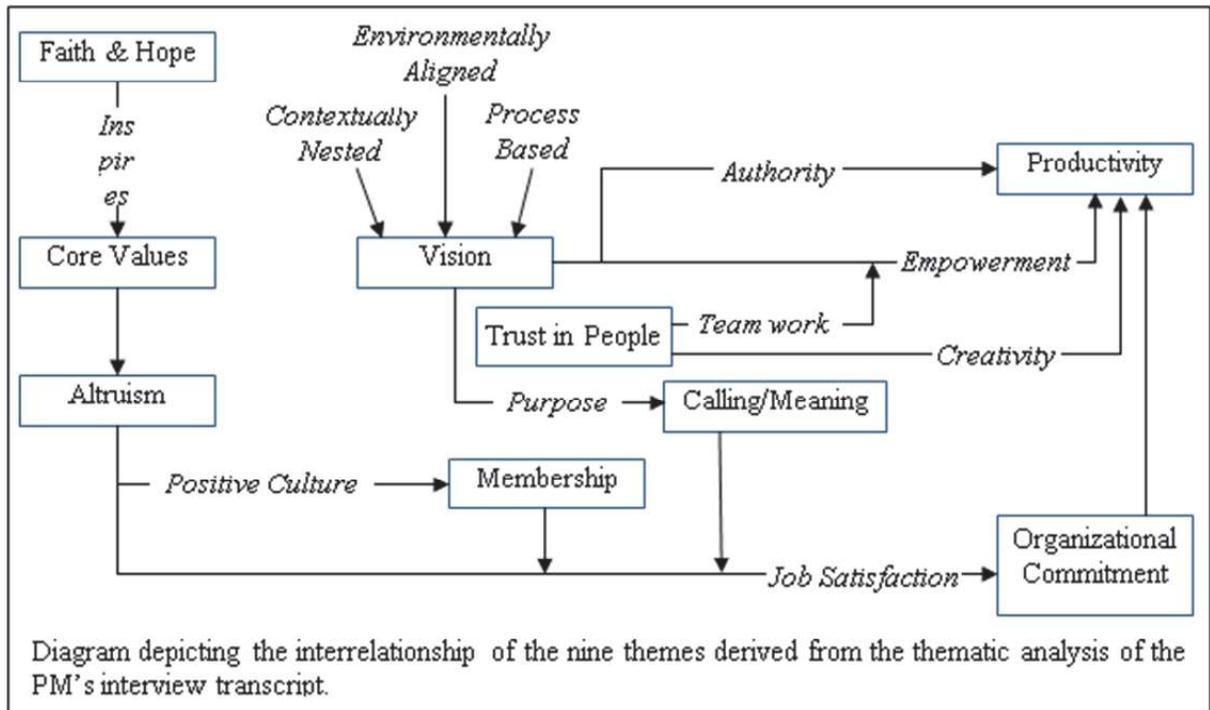
## DISCUSSION

The objective of the thematic analysis was to examine if the PM portrayed spiritual leadership characteristics, and identify the possible impacts of the PM’s leadership on his organization and his subordinates. The study was conducted through an in-depth open-ended semi-structured interview using questions from the interview guide that were focused on soliciting a description of the experiences and perceptions of the subject’s leadership. 13 of the interview guide’s 19 questions were focused on identifying if the PM’s leadership paradigm was congruent with the eight characteristics of spiritual leadership posited by Fry’s (2003) theory. Nine of the questions from the interview guide examined the impacts of the PM’s leadership on his organization and its members.

### Operational Model Diagram

Nine different themes emerged from the thematic analysis of the transcribed interview with the PM on his leadership experiences and views of those experiences. The operational model diagram in figure 1 portrayed the leadership philosophy of the PM derived from an analysis of the themes that emerged from the thematic analysis. The figure depicted the interrelationship of the themes and the potential impacts of the PM’s leadership.

**FIGURE 1**  
**PROGRAM MANAGER (PM) LEADERSHIP OPERATIONAL MODEL DIAGRAM**



The PM’s (2013) faith in God inspired his core values of integrity and altruism. The caring, concern and appreciation expressed in the PM’s (2013) altruistic leadership appeared to result in member job satisfaction, which seemed to have enhanced the commitment of his organizational members. The results of the study also suggested that the PM’s (2013) altruistic leadership facilitated a positive organizational

climate not only within individual teams but across teams that resulted not only in increased job satisfaction of the organizational members but probably intensified their organizational commitment.

The PM's (2015) vision, which was the underlying foundation for the organization's activities, provided organizational members with the authority to do their jobs. The PM (2015) posited that his vision, along with his trust in his people, empowered them to perform their jobs within the bounds of his vision. This trust appeared to have engendered teamwork and spawned creativity, which appeared to have enhanced the productivity of the organization (PM, 2015). The vision and the leader articulated feelings about the mission seemed to have facilitated a sense of calling and meaning for the members within the organization since it helped the members understand the importance of their jobs and how their efforts make a difference to the warfighters and the security of the nation (PM, 2015). Calling and meaning appeared to have provided a sense of satisfaction for organizational members that enhanced organizational commitment within the organization (PM, 2015). Lastly, the results of the study suggested that productivity within the PM's (2015) organization was probably enhanced by the increased commitment of organizational members.

The results of the thematic analysis of the PM interview transcript were analyzed to determine if evidence existed to address the research question. These included an examination to see if the data supported the possibility that the PM displayed spiritual leadership characteristics, and how the PM's leadership may have facilitated a positive organizational climate that influenced the organization's success.

### **PM's Display of Spiritual Leadership Characteristics**

An examination of the PM's responses during the 13 interview questions related to spiritual leadership strongly suggested that the PM portrayed spiritual leadership characteristics. Fry (2003) posited that spiritual leaders must understand their core values. During the interview the PM unhesitatingly articulated his core values of integrity and altruism. He indicated that the source of his core values was his Christian beliefs (PM, 2015), which were not subjective but immutable. His core value of integrity is one of three high core values, which according to Lee and Elliott-Lee (2006), are non-negotiable enduring principles. Furthermore, Fry (2003) noted that integrity is one of eleven "personal affirmations" of the "values of hope/faith and altruistic love" within the spiritual leadership construct (p. 712). The PM's (2015) second core value of altruism, which he described as both the golden rule and as "love thy neighbor" also happens to be one of the eight characteristics of spiritual leadership posited by Fry (2003). Fry et al. (2005) posited that altruistic love is "a sense of wholeness, harmony, and well-being produced through care, concern, and appreciation for both self and others" (p. 844). Similarly, the PM (2015) explained that leaders must "take good care" of their team "just like you would your family." Since he considered his organization as his "second family," his balanced focus enabled him to address organizational member concerns by helping them meet their needs (PM, 2015). Additionally, the PM (2015) has provided an appreciative climate within his organization as substantiated by his subordinates during the focus group interview. The PM put his people first and is concerned about their emotional wellbeing (team leader, 2015). This is because the PM values everyone regardless of their position within the organization (test engineer, 2015).

Fry (2003) contended that vision is "of utmost importance" since it provides the direction for the organization (p. 711). Similarly, the PM (2015) explained in his interview that vision was the "underlying foundation" for the organizational activities" since it provided direction and guidance. Fry (2003) noted that vision simplifies decision making and coordinates the actions of organizational members. Correspondingly, the PM (2015) elucidated that his vision empowered his direct reports and provided them with the authority to act since they do not have "to ask permission to do everything." The focus group agreed that the PM empowered his people by giving them the freedom to execute their tasks "without constantly having to check in" (lead test engineer, 2015).

Fry et al. (2005) defined faith and hope as "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction that the organization's vision/purpose/mission will be fulfilled" (p. 844). Fry (2003) noted that faith and hope provide the assured belief that the organization will successfully accomplish its vision and mission. In his

interview, the PM (2015) stated that faith and hope originated from his belief in God and that this provided him with the ability to have faith in his team and hope for success. The PM (2015) also expressed that this resulted in his ability to trust his subordinates to “make it happen.” The lead test engineer (2015) stated that “I appreciate the management’s allowance and empowerment of the people to do and complete” the tasks. Although Fry (2003) did not include trust within the scope of faith and hope, he did include trust as one of the “qualities of spiritual leadership” within the characteristic of altruistic love (p. 695). Fry (2003) noted that the spiritual leader’s vision must facilitate cooperation and trust within the organization.

Fry (2003) also contended that calling is the way individual’s feel when their service to others makes a difference, which ultimately provides “meaning and purpose in life” (p. 703). The PM (2015) indicated that the importance of his mission provided “a sense of satisfaction” since he knows his organization supports the nation’s defense by providing warfighters with the best affordable capabilities possible. The PM (2015) noted that his beliefs substantiated by his actions about the importance of the organization’s mission has filtered down throughout the organization. It has resulted in everyone believing in and working toward one goal (PM, 2015). Fry (2003) noted that the leader’s vision and actions generates a sense of calling and a feeling of membership within the organization. The PM (2015) explained that the “very collegial, trusting, caring,” family like climate within his organization has engendered a sense of membership within the organization that he described as similar to a “chemical bond.” This climate appeared to be a result of the PM’s care and concern for his people, whom he puts first (team leader, 2015) and readily interacts with (test engineer, 2015).

Fry (2003) contended that hope and faith in the organization’s vision, and altruistic love together create a sense of calling and membership, which he referred to as “spiritual survival” (p. 714). These in turn produce organizational commitment and productivity within the organization (Fry, 2003). Fry (2003) posited that if employees have a “sense of calling and membership” and belong to an organization that possesses an altruistic environment, they will want to remain with the organization (p. 714). Furthermore, Fry (2003) argued that if employees have a sense of calling and membership, and also have faith in their organization’s vision, they will dedicate themselves to improve the productivity of the organization. The PM (2015) noted that his vision and the positive climate within the organization resulted in members’ job satisfaction and a sense of membership. He also pointed out that this resulted in teamwork and cooperation between employees that brought the organization success and growth even in an austere fiscal environment within the government, which he noted was an “almost impossible” accomplishment (PM, 2015).

A comparison of Fry’s (2003) theory with the PM responses highlighted that many similarities exist between the characteristics of Fry’s (2003) spiritual leadership theory and the leadership experiences and views of the PM. Additionally, many of the PM’s responses were corroborated with the perceptions of his subordinates that were articulated during the focus group interview. Consequently, it is posited that the PM probably portrayed the characteristics of a spiritual leader.

### **PM Leadership Impacts**

Despite the fact that the interview with the PM revealed his humility, the results of the thematic analysis suggested that the PM’s leadership has created a positive organizational climate which has strengthened the organizational commitment and productivity of the members. On three different occasions during the interview the PM (2015) stated “I don’t know if it’s me; I don’t think it’s me.” He noted that “there are a lot of things involved here” in reference to his people’s feelings of membership, their organizational commitment, and the organization’s productivity (PM, 2015).

Despite his obvious reticence to take credit for all of his organization’s success, during his interview the PM (2015) noted that his core values provided a foundation for his leadership, which appeared to have resulted in organizational members being inspired to work for him, and motivated to achieve the goals that were outlined by his vision. The PM’s (2015) statement is supported by Bass and Avolio’s (1994) supposition that value-based leadership connects leader and subordinate values. It provides a vision that invigorates member motivation, which strengthens member commitment and productivity (Bass &

Avolio, 1994). The PM (2015) pointed out that the direction and boundaries provided from his vision gave his direct reports authority and empowerment to perform their jobs. Fry (2003) argued that organizational members that are empowered are more devoted to perform their assigned tasks. The PM (2015) pointed out that his trust in his organizational members provided them the freedom to be creative, which enhanced their productivity. Additionally, the PM's (2015) altruistic leadership, which was focused on member needs, resulted in an appreciative family like organizational environment that not only created a sense of job satisfaction for his organization's members but facilitated within them a "good feeling" about being in the organization. The PM's (2015) comment was supported by Fry's (2003) contention that organizations with altruistic cultures, and with employees that possess a "sense of calling and membership," have members that tend to be committed to the organization (p. 714). Fry's (2003) supposition supported the PM's assertion that his members are committed to the organization and only depart from the organization to pursue externally available growth opportunities. The PM (2015) contended that his organization "works very well together," which has facilitated the organization meeting its goals despite the austere budgetary environment of the government. The findings from the thematic analysis suggested that the PM's leadership probably played a significant role in the members' high organizational commitment and productivity.

### **Limitations**

This study was limited to an interview with the PM and eight of his 22 subordinates on the experiences and perceptions of the PM's leadership within the context of the spiritual leadership paradigm. Although the thematic analysis of the interview transcription data strongly supported the supposition that the PM's leadership included the display of the eight spiritual leadership characteristics, the study also suggested that the positive organizational climate within the project management organization was the result of the PM's leadership. Since leaders are not limited to the use of just one leadership style other leadership paradigms such as servant (Winston & Fields, 2015) and transformational leadership (Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016), which are also theorized to have organizational commitment as an outcome, were not examined even though theoretically they could have also been portrayed by the PM. Secondly, since organizational dynamics are complex, there could be other confounding factors (Cozby & Bates, 2012) besides the PM's leadership that may have also contributed to the organizational commitment and productivity that cannot be ascertained without an expansion of the scope of the study to include other areas related to the organizational dynamics of the project management office.

### **Recommendation for Future Research**

In order to corroborate the perceptions of the PM's leadership experiences as depicted in the operational model diagram, empirical surveys on the effects of the PM's leadership may be required with the PM's superiors, peers, and other direct reports and their subordinates that were not interviewed. The operational model diagram provides a theoretically speculative foundation that can be used to perform future empirical research required to validate this model and to determine if it is generalizable within not only the project management but other organizational contexts. This future research should probably include an examination of the generalizability of the possible interrelationships between the themes suggested in the operational model diagram.

### **Conclusion**

A study of the leadership of an exemplary program management office was conducted through an in-depth semi-structured interview with open ended questions. A thematic analysis was performed on the data from the interview transcript using multiple coding methods that included in vivo, descriptive, pattern, and axial coding (Saldana, 2013). The results of the first and second coding were further analyzed through a process known as "themeing the data" that identified the interview themes and their interrelationships (Saldana, 2013, p. 175), which were used to create an operational model diagram (Saldana, 2013) that depicted the PM's leadership experiences. The results of the thematic analysis and

the operational model diagram strongly suggested that the PM portrayed the characteristics of spiritual leadership espoused in Fry's (2003) theory. The results also suggested that the organizational commitment within his organization may have possibly been impacted by the PM's display of spiritual leadership characteristics. The results from this limited scope investigation appeared to warrant more detailed future research to support the study's speculative conclusions and determine the possible generalizability of the operational model diagram within different organizational contexts.

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