Character Development Through Spiritual Leadership

Patrick J. Sweeney
United States Military Academy
Bldg 601, Thayer Hall
West Point, NY 10999
patrick.sweeney@usma.edu
845-938-5015

Louis W. Fry
Texas A&M University – Central Texas
1901 South Clear Creek Road
Killeen, TX  76549
fry@tarleton.edu
254-519-5476
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Abstract

How to develop leaders’ character is a challenging question pursued by many managers, psychologists, and consultants. To address this question, the authors introduce a developmental model for character based on West Point’s Domain of the Human Spirit. The model proposes that the integration of the leader’s core values and beliefs into the self-identity is at the heart of character development. The authors then combine the character development model with spiritual leadership theory to provide readers with a practical guide for developing leaders’ character. In doing so authors argue that character development is, at its heart, a spiritual process and that any model that focuses on leadership and character development must incorporate an inner life practice with an emphasis on developing mindfulness and the qualities of spiritual leadership.
Character Development Through Spiritual Leadership

“Good character is more to be praised than outstanding talent. Most talents are to some extent a gift. Good character, by contrast, is not given to us. We have to build it piece by piece—by thought, choice, courage, and determination.” --John Luther

Leadership theorists, researchers, and practitioners have proposed and found that a leader’s character significantly impacts group members’ motivation, willingness to accept leader influence, satisfaction, and general well-being, which contribute to both individual and organizational effectiveness (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Bass, 2008; Fry, 2003). Character is the wellspring for leaders’ ability to earn group members’ trust and exercise influence both within and outside an organization, therefore it is essential for effective leadership (Marrella, 2009; Sweeney, Thompson, & Blanton, 2009). Leaders’ character influences what they attend to, perceptions, judgments, intentions, and, most importantly, behavior (Bass, 2008; Colby & Damon, 1993; Peterson, 2006). Thus, leaders’ character allows followers to confidently predict that their leaders’ will act, in all circumstances in a moral and just manner that promotes the welfare of individuals, the group, and the community (Bass, 2008; Sperry, 1999). This creates a safe and trusting organization climate that empowers employees’ creativity and innovativeness, which enhances effectiveness and well-being (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Golembiewski & McConkie, 1975).

Moreover, leaders’ character influences the development of group members’ character as well as the organization’s culture (Avolio, 2005; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Klann, 2007). Through their day-to-day actions, leaders are powerfully communicating to followers who they are and what the organization stands for in terms of values and purpose. Leaders of character earn the respect and trust of their followers by living in accordance with their own and the
organization’s values and beliefs, this provides the leaders with referent power (Sweeney, 2007). Group members tend to hold leaders of character as role models and imitate their behavior in an effort to transform their own character and actions and gain their approval (Bass & Steidlmeyer, 1999; Klann, 2007; Pfaff, 2003). Furthermore, these leaders establish a climate where moral and ethical behavior is expected, encouraged, and rewarded. This positive climate creates a community committed to working and living in a moral and ethical manner, thus setting the conditions for character development throughout the organization and enhancing effectiveness (Marrella, 2009).

Leaders’ character also serves a benchmark function for intra- and interpersonal assessments and bolsters their resiliency. Regarding the benchmark function, leaders use their character to set developmental goals and to judge their own actions (Peterson, 2006). Feedback from this internal assessment process provides them insights into the progress of their developmental journey to become the idealized leaders of character (Avolio, 2005). Leaders also use their character as a benchmark to assess others’ character when making decisions concerning trust (Peterson, 2006). In terms of resilience, leaders draw on their character for strength of will, purpose, and meaning during adversity (Department of the Army, 2006; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Peterson, 2006). As Victor Frankl (1984) gleaned from his experiences in the concentration camps, if people can find meaning and purpose in their suffering, there is almost nothing they cannot endure. Leaders with strong character can leverage challenges and hardships to gain insights about themselves and organizations to further development (Avolio, 2005). In addition to influencing their own meaning of experiences, leaders’ character plays an important role in shaping group members’ perceptions of their experiences. Leaders that communicate meaning in how the challenge or adversity is testing the character of the organization’s members
or frame an experience in terms of what the members will learn about themselves, foster perseverance and growth from challenges and adversity (Campbell, Campbell, & Ness, 2008; Tedeshi & Calhoun, 2004).

Most of us have experienced the positive effects of working for, serving with, or being in a relationship with a leader of good character. Have you ever wondered how this leader built the strength of character that inspires people to give and be their best? The purpose of this article is to answer this perplexing question. In order to do so, we first offer a definition of leader character based on reviews of the leadership and psychological literatures. Next, we introduce a developmental model for character based on West Point’s Domain of the Human Spirit model (Sweeney, Hannah, and Snider, 2007). The Domain of the Human Spirit is one of the six developmental dimensions that make up West Point’s leader development framework (USMA, 2009). Then we integrate this character development model into spiritual leadership theory (Fry, 2003, 2009) to provide readers with an integrative, empirically supported, and practical guide to develop leader character. In doing so we argue that leader character development is, at its heart, a spiritual process and that any model that focuses on leadership and character development must incorporate an inner life practice with an emphasis on developing mindfulness and the qualities of spiritual leadership.

**A Model for Character Development**

**Defining Character**

A review of the leadership and psychological literatures yields several themes regarding the definition of character. First, character is manifested through leaders’ consistent moral and ethical behavior across all situations (Bass, 2008; Peterson, 2006; Sperry, 2009). Consistency of behavior, regardless of context, suggests that enduring cognitive structures such as a leader’s
self-schema or self-identity and heritable temperament play significant roles in the formation of character (Blasi, 1993; Cloninger, Svrakic, & Przybeck, 1993).

Second, people use leaders’ actions to infer the underlying values and beliefs and to determine the leaders’ intentions behind the behavior. Inferences of good character are made if followers perceive that their leaders’ are engaging in moral and ethical behavior with the intention of being consistent with their own and the organization’s values (Bass, 2008; Pfaff, 2003; Marrella, 2009). Consistency of leaders’ behavior across contexts, especially if they must incur cost, increases the likelihood that subordinates would attribute the behavior to internal, dispositional characteristics such as strong values (Kelley and Thibaut, 1978).

Third, leaders’ system of beliefs about virtues and values influences their perceptions of and judgments in moral and ethical issues in situations, creates intentions to behave in accordance with own and organization’s values, and underlies moral and ethical actions (Avolio, 2005; Peterson, 2006; Rest, 1994). People use moral and/or religious values as the basis for defining goals on and establishing rules for how they should live their lives. Some of the values used to define character in the literatures are: respect, fairness, caring, loyalty, integrity, humility, and service to others (Bass & Steidlmeyer, 1999; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Leaders’ values influence what they pay attention, their perceptions, judgments, and, most importantly, behavior (Department of the Army, 2006; Sweeney et al., 2007).

Fourth, character development is a continuous developmental process in which leaders increasingly integrate their values and beliefs into their self-identities (Avolio, 2005; Bergman, 2002; Peterson, 2006). The more central leaders’ values and beliefs are to their self-identities, the greater the likelihood moral and ethical actions (Colby & Damon, 1993). The centrality of values and beliefs to leaders’ identities creates powerful internal motivational forces for them to behave
morally to maintain consistency of their self-concepts. Thus, the integration of leaders’ values and beliefs systems with their identities shifts motivational forces to behave in a moral and ethical manner from external of the leaders to internal, which tends to close the gap between intentions and actions (Damon, 1984).

Finally, character involves the development of strengths that facilitate congruence between leaders’ values and beliefs and their actions. Some of these important enabling character strengths contained in the literatures are: self-regulation, agency, humanity, transcendence, wisdom, justice, and courage which bolster the likelihood leaders will behave in accordance with their moral and ethical belief system (Cloninger et al., 1993; Klann, 2007; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Leaders use strengths to development, sustain, and communicate their character (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). For instance, during a crisis of a major product recall, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) maintains her composure and ensures the company stands by its values of excellence in product and customer service, regardless of the cost. Employees that see the CEO’s behavior would infer from her character strengths of integrity and self-regulation she possessed good character.

To summarize, the integration of core values and beliefs and self-identity appear central to character formation because it shifts the motivation for moral and ethical behavior from external sources to sources internal to the leader. This shift to internal motivation sources increases consistency of managers’ behavior across contexts, due to the fact they act in a moral and ethical manner to maintain consistency with their self-identities, thus the influence of external pressures are mitigated. Leaders demonstrate and others infer leaders’ character from consistent moral and ethical behavior across situations. Character strengths such as agency, self-regulation, transcendence, etc., appear to perform both a development and sustaining function
regarding character. Thus, based on the review of the literature, the authors propose the following definition of leader’s character: *consistent moral and ethical actions for the purpose of maintaining congruence with one’s own and the organization’s values and beliefs*. This definition acknowledges that one’s consistency of moral and ethical behavior increases as core values and beliefs become more integrated into the person’s various identities.

**Components of Character**

The authors acknowledge that a leader’s character is a complex and dynamic psychological process and system. To understand character and the processes that shape it, the components must be analyzed. Breaking character down into its components not only facilitates a greater understanding of the concept, but also provides both leaders and leader developers with a common language and developmental targets. The model of character development, outlined below, are based on a developmental model Sweeney et al., (2007) created to define the Domain of the Human Spirit dimension of West Point’s Cadet Leader Development System, which the Army subsequently adopted for its Comprehensive Soldier Fitness Program (See Figure 1).

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**Core values and beliefs and self-identity**. The leadership and psychological literatures suggest that a leader’s core values and belief system is the foundation of character (Bass, 2008; Day, Harrison, & Halpin, 2009; Fry, 2005a; Marrella, 2009; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Core values and beliefs are the cognitive structures that influence leaders’ awareness to moral and ethical issues, judgment, intentions, and moral and ethical behavior (Bergman, 2002; Colby & Damon, 1993; Hannah & Sweeney, 2007; Peterson, 2006; Sweeney et al., 2007). Followers use leaders’ behavior, over time, to infer the leaders’ underlying values and beliefs. Leaders who
demonstrate, through their actions, the possession of such universal values as honesty, integrity, courage, compassion, and humility are likely to earn attributions of good character from their followers (Fry, 2005a; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Group members’ perception that leaders possess good character fosters the development of trust which leads to greater willingness to accept influence (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Furthermore, developmental psychologists propose that the degree that individuals integrate their core values and beliefs with their self-identities influences the consistency of moral and ethical behavior (Blasi, 1993). The integration appears to start during adolescence and is linked to the complexity of an individual’s perspective. As one’s perspective develops through stages, motivational forces influencing behavior shifts from external to internal sources and the person gains the ability to self-author and integrate values and beliefs into the self-identity (Damon, 1984; Kegan, 1982). The more central leaders’ core values and beliefs are to their self-identities, the greater the moral awareness and the more complex the moral reasoning resulting in consistent moral and ethical action. Leaders are internally motivated to behave in a moral and ethical manner because they believe it is the right thing to do and also to maintain consistency with their self-identities, to behave otherwise would violate their concept of self (Bass, 2008; Blasi, 1993; Colby & Damon, 1993). Conversely, leaders who are in the early stages of this integration process are still highly susceptible to external sources of motivation, which influences the consistency of moral and ethical actions. Therefore, the integration of leaders’ values and belief systems with their self-identities appears essential for character development and consistent moral and ethical behavior in all circumstances.

For instance, West Point has recognized the importance of leaders integrating core values and beliefs into their self-identities to ensure moral and ethical conduct, especially during combat
operations. The target for development during the 47 month West Point experience is to shape the unique professional identity of Officership. The identity of Officership consists of four facets: warrior, leader of character, member of the profession of arms, and servant of the Nation. Each facet embodies distinctive expectations regarding who an officer should be in terms of identity. The leader of character facet of this identity requires cadets to live by and start to internalize the seven Army values of loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage into their self-identities. The cadets’ internalizing and integrating these professional and personal core values and beliefs into their self-identities forms the foundation of their character and ensures consistent moral and ethical behavior (USMA, 2010).

**Perspective Complexity and Moral judgment.** One’s worldview or perspective consists is comprised of an individual’s most central values and beliefs concerning purpose and meaning in life, truths about the world, identify, and vision for realizing one’s full potential and purpose (Maslow, 1970). It is the lens through which the person views the world and makes sense of one’s experiences (Kegan, 1982). This complex, dynamic cognitive framework determines what one attends to, how one interprets events and experiences, knowledge and experiences one seeks, and how one behaviors (Fiske & Taylor, 1984).

A person’s moral judgment involves the person’s ability to recognize a moral or ethical issue in a situation, assess how possible responses impact others, and determine what course of action would best uphold a moral ideal (Rest, 1984, 1994). Moral judgment is influenced by an individual’s developmental stage and moral knowledge. Regarding development, researchers have found that as the complexity of one’s perspective develops; the individual’s capability to conduct moral reasoning at more complex levels also increases (Kegan, 1982; Kohlberg, 1984). The increase in cognitive complexity provides the individual a greater understanding of one’s
interactions and interdependency with the social world, results in a greater capability to reason abstractly about moral and ethical issues (Hannah & Sweeney, 2007).

Moreover, knowledge about moral and ethical issues also contributes to a person’s ability to think more abstractly about moral and ethical issues and also to recognize, store, retrieve, process and make meaning of moral information. An individual’s morals and ethics knowledge comes from education and experiences. Education that includes exposure to different perspectives and teaches one how to think, frame, and make moral and ethical decisions increases the complexity of a person’s mental schema for morality and self-efficacy (Hannah & Sweeney, 2007). Furthermore, role models and mentors also assist in building the complexity of a person’s moral schema through moral behavior, guided reflection, and assisting the individual in making meaning of moral dilemmas.

**Supporting character strengths.** Character strengths are psychological traits or states that serve three major functions regarding sustaining, developing, and communicating character. First, leaders use their character strengths to facilitate the integration of core values and beliefs into their self-concepts for identities. For instance, leaders who regularly reflect upon and assess the core values and beliefs they want to define them, are using the character strength of self-awareness to further the integration of core values and beliefs with self-concepts.

Second, leaders use character strengths to facilitate moral judgment to ensure that their actions are consistent with the values and beliefs that define who they are (self-identity), thus both affirming the self and fostering continuous development (Blasi, 1993; Peterson and Seligman, 2004). For example, a business leader, who holds integrity as a core value, has to make decisions regarding allocation of bonuses. To ensure the decisions are honestly and
consistently applied, the leader is likely to use the character strength of self-regulation to check the impulse of greed and to ensure fair distribution. Also, the leader is likely to use social awareness to gauge group members’ probable reactions to the decisions. Thus, the leader uses three character strengths to ensure that bonus allocation decisions are congruent with her core value of justice. Peterson and Seligman (2004) provide taxonomy of twenty-four character strengths that support and demonstrate six universal virtues or core values.

Third, character strengths serve as means to demonstrate core values and beliefs to others (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). For instance, the combat leader who challenges a directive from higher headquarters because it needlessly places soldiers’ lives at risk, demonstrates the character strength of bravery but also communicates to others that the leader possesses the core value of courage. Followers use leaders’ actions to make inferences about content of their leaderships’ value systems (Kelley and Thibaut, 1978).

Outlined below are the supporting character strengths that facilitate the integration of core values and beliefs into a leader’s self-identity, enhance moral judgments, and increase the consistency of the leader’s moral and ethical behavior. These strengths are interdependent, thus activation of one serves to active the others in a synergistic manner (See Figure 1).

**Sense of agency.** Agency entails an individual assuming responsibility for one’s character development and making a commitment to living in accordance with one’s core values and beliefs (Cloninger et al., 1993; Maslow, 1970). Leaders with agency are actively engaged in the continuous development of their character through reflection, study, and seeking out development experiences. Agency influences one’s motivation to commit to live in a moral manner in the toughest of circumstances. Moreover, agency is empowering in that it promotes psychological autonomy and self-efficacy, which are critical for the integration of core values
and beliefs into the self-identity and the development of a more complex meaning-making system (Kegan, 1982; Maslow, 1970; Rogers, 1961).

**Self-awareness.** Self-awareness is a process in which a person gains an understanding of who one is in terms of values and beliefs, strengths, and weaknesses; what one wants to become; how to determine truth and meaning; and how one should live life. An individual gains self-awareness through a commitment to regular reflection and introspection on identity, core values and beliefs, assumptions about the world, purpose, experiences, feedback from others, and aspiration of who one wants to become (Maslow, 1970). Reflection and introspection are essential for a person to self-author and integrate one’s core values and beliefs system with one’s self-identity. The process of self-authoring provides a sense of psychological autonomy which serves to enhance one’s sense of agency (Rogers, 1961). Furthermore, self-awareness is also crucial for character development because a thorough understanding of the self is necessary to envision future desired end states, assess the gap between present state and end states, and create feasible developmental plans to achieve desired goals (Avolio, 2005). Through self-awareness an individual shapes and develops the core self, and gains an appreciation of how key values and beliefs influence daily behavior and the pursuit of a fulfilling life (Williamson, 1965).

Another important aspect of self-awareness is mindfulness. Mindfulness entails a person’s enhanced state of awareness concerning what one is experiencing in the present in terms of thoughts, feelings, needs, and the environment. The individual’s ability to focus attention on and gain awareness to current thoughts, intuitions, feelings, and behavior assists one in gaining insights into and, ultimately, the ability to self-regulate habitual patterns of thinking and responding, fears, negative thought patterns, intentions, and behavior (Brown & Ryan, 2003). This meta-cognitive capacity to step back, monitor and take a perspective on one’s thoughts,
feelings, and desires, while acting in the present provides the leader with psychological autonomy to regulate behavior (Kegan, 1982; Rogers, 1961). Therefore, self-awareness is critical to character development because it provides leaders with the means to understand and regulate their thoughts, feelings, and behavior.

**Self-regulation.** Self-regulation is closely related to self-awareness and involves the ability to understand and control one’s emotions, thoughts, and behavior (Baumeister, 2005; Goleman, 1995; Klann, 2007). Understanding the source of one’s thoughts, emotions, and behavior (self-awareness) empowers an individual to implement measures to control and/or harness them. Likewise, recognizing how patterns of thought or mental models influence perceptions, motivation, and behavior enables the individual to think more freely, which enhances agency and self-motivation (Blasi, 1993; Kegan, 1982; Rogers, 1961). In addition, an understanding of the causes and the consequences of past emotional reactions and behaviors allows an individual to choose future behavior that is aligned with values, beliefs, and goals. Thus, self-regulation is a prerequisite to moral and ethical behavior (Goleman, 1995).

**Social awareness.** Social awareness involves the realization that relationships with others play an important role in the development of one’s character and self-identity and that one must possess certain social skills to build positive relationships with others. These uplifting relationships with significant others (i.e., family, friends, coaches, teachers, and mentors) assists a person in shaping values and beliefs, discovering and creating an identity, finding truth in the world, learning moral and ethical decision-making techniques, determining a direction and purpose in life, and realizing one’s potential (Baumeister, 2005; Sweeney et al., 2007).

In order to harness the power of the developmental resources of relationships an individual must possess the social skills necessary to establish and maintain positive
relationships. The set of basic social skills include respect, empathy, compassion, transcendence of self interests, communication skills, and trust of others (Goleman, 1995; Sweeney et al., 2007). Particularly important is the recognition that other people have the right to hold different values, beliefs, and customs and that one must, without giving up one’s own beliefs, show others due consideration and openness to alternate viewpoints. Furthermore, a person’s ability to see the world through the eyes of others in order to understand their perspectives, their life situations, potential feelings, and predict future behavior facilitates the establishment of positive relationships. Another important requirement, in the establishment of positive relationships, is mutual cooperation. People must have the ability to put their self-interests aside and work for the benefit of all involved in the relationship. Finally, communication skills, especially listening, are very important to establishing positive relationships because they assist in clarifying expectations, intentions, goals, and reduce conflicts. Given the diversity in today’s businesses and the requirement to work in diverse cultural environments, the development of social awareness in all personnel becomes critically important.

**Self-motivation.** Self-motivation entails the intrinsic forces inside a person that influence moral and ethical behavior. The intrinsic forces are created through an understanding of one’s identity, the autonomy to self-author values and beliefs, and the integration of one’s values and beliefs into the self-identity. As the individual starts to integrate values and beliefs with the self-identity, the sources influencing one’s behavior shift from extrinsic to intrinsic. The more centrally integrated a person’s values and belief system is with the self-identity, the stronger the intrinsic forces to act congruent with the identity to preserve the concept of self (Bergman, 2002; Blasi, 1993). The intrinsic forces created during this integration process, bolsters one’s
consistency of moral and ethical behavior. Thus, the integration of self-identity with a self-authored values and beliefs system is essential to character development.

Moreover, leaders’ expectancy that living and leading in accordance with their values and beliefs will enhance their authenticity and, also, their effectiveness both as a person and leader are additional internal sources of motivation that influence behavior (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The sense of confidence or optimism provides leaders the strength to live and lead in accordance with their values and beliefs, even when they must incur cost to do so (Sweeney et al., 2007). For example, General Eric Shinseki, then Chief of Staff of U.S. Army, told members of the U.S. Congress his honest assessment about the troop strength needed to complete the Iraqi mission, knowing full well that he would more than likely lose his job for doing so. Thus, leaders’ confidence that leading and living in accordance with their values is right way to do business and achieve fulfillment, bolsters their commitment to moral and ethical behavior.

**Influence of cultures (organization and /or society).** A person’s character development takes place in the social networks one is embedded in. The cultures of the organizations (e.g., family, schools, sports teams, faith groups, clubs, etc.) a person belongs to influences one’s values and beliefs, self-identity, attitudes about morality, augments or hinders the development of character strengths, provide social support for moral or immoral behavior, and may hold one accountable for moral and ethical (Klann, 2007; Peterson, 2006). Thus to enhance the development of one’s character, a person should choose organizations whose values and beliefs are congruent with one’s own.

Moral and ethical organizations have cultures that clearly communicate a vision, purpose, and values that define what it stands for and the future it seeks to create. These organizations require members to make a commitment to behave in a moral and ethical manner before joining
and also have policies and procedures in place to ensure all behave in a moral manner. For instance, new cadets at West Point take an oath stating they will live by the values of duty, honor, and country and hold other cadets accountable to these values prior to joining the Corps of Cadets. The institution relies on the Cadet Honor Code to ensure all live by their promise to live honorably (USMA, 2009). In this type of organization, the members support and encourage each other to live in a moral manner. Thus, the shared values of an organization’s culture and policies serve as both support and social control mechanisms to ensure moral and ethical behavior by all members. Also, organizations should ensure that they have systems in place to recognize and reinforce moral behavior and punish immoral behavior.

Furthermore, moral organizations have leaders that serve as role models to communicate its values and beliefs and also to serve as coaches and mentors to support and assist group members in developing their character. Through the coaching and mentoring sessions and daily interactions, leaders shape meaning as to why moral and ethical behavior is important to the organization and each group member’s identity. Providing group members with experiences (actual or case studies) that challenges their values and beliefs while giving them feedback and support, and then coaching them through the reflection on the experience is one of the most impactful means leaders can use to assist in shaping followers’ character (Hannah & Sweeney, 2007; Van Velsor & McCauley, 2004).

The model of character development given in Figure 1 is consistent with the leadership and psychological literatures and the authors’ definition in placing the integration of an individual’s core values and beliefs system and identity as central to character development. The integration enhances leaders’ moral judgment and shifts motivational forces to act in a moral and ethical manner from external to internal sources. The self is now involved in all moral and ethical
decisions, which increases the leader’s attention to and motivation to resolve moral and ethical dilemmas congruent with values and beliefs to maintain consistency of the self. The model also identifies the character strengths and discusses how they assist in developing, maintaining, and communicating character. Next, we integrate this character development model with spiritual leadership theory to provide an empirically supported framework to discuss the practical application of building character in the workplace.

**Spiritual Leadership Theory**

Spiritual leadership theory can be viewed as an emerging paradigm that links spirituality and leadership (Fry, 2005b). Spiritual in this context relates to acknowledging and developing the essence or animating force that makes people human. Most of the theory that is offered in this area comes from the fields of religious theology and practice (Blackaby and Blackaby, 2001; McNeal, 2000) and leadership ethics and values (Barrett, 2003; Fairholm, 1998; Greenleaf, 1977; Kanungo & Mendonca, 1996). To date, the theory of spiritual leadership (Fry, 2003, 2005a, 2008, 2009) has been tested, in a diverse array of organizations including secondary schools, a university, military units, city governments, police, and for profit organizations. Results from these studies indicate the spiritual leadership model positively influences employee life satisfaction, organizational commitment and productivity, various measures of work unit performance, and sales growth (Fry & Matherly, 2006; Fry & Slocum, 2008; Fry, Vitucci, & Cedillo, 2005; Fry, Hannah, Noel, & Walumba, in press).

Spiritual leadership theory (Fry, 2003) builds on this work from spiritual, religion, and ethics-based leadership theory. It is based on a definition and generic process of leadership as motivation to change (Fry, 2003). From this perspective, leadership entails motivating followers by creating a vision of a long-term challenging, desirable, compelling and different future.
When combined with a sense of purpose and mission, the vision establishes the foundation for leader character that includes the fundamental core values and ethical system that provide the basis for moral judgments concerning moral and ethical behavior (Fry, 2005a).

Spiritual leadership comprises the values, attitudes, and behaviors necessary to intrinsically motivate one’s self and others through calling and membership, which positively influences personal commitment and productivity, psychological well-being, and life satisfaction (Fry, 2003, 2005, 2008). A general model of character development through spiritual leadership is given in Figure 2. Essential to spiritual leadership are the key processes of:

1. Creating a transcendent vision of service to others whereby one experiences a sense of calling so that their life has purpose and meaning and makes a difference.

2. Developing core values and establishing an organization culture based on altruistic love whereby one has a sense of membership and belonging, feels understood and appreciated, and has genuine care, concern, and appreciation for BOTH self and others.

The source of spiritual leadership is an inner life or spiritual practice. Inner life inspires and positively influences development of (1) hope/faith in a transcendent vision of service to key stakeholders, and (2) the values of altruistic love. Inner life speaks to the feeling individuals have about the fundamental meaning of who they are, what they are doing, and the contributions they are making (Vaiil, 1998). Inner life refines one’s worldview, solidifies core values and beliefs and strengths identity. Spiritual practices include individual activities such as meditation, prayer, religious services, yoga, journaling, and walking in nature and organizational contexts which facilitated individual practices (e.g., rooms for inner silence and reflection). Inner life practices
help individuals become more self-aware, gain agency, develop their identities and integrate with core values, and increase the complexity of their worldviews (Fry & Kriger, 2009).

**Character Development Through Spiritual Leadership**

Combining the spiritual leadership and character development models provides practitioners with developmental targets regarding character, a common language and more comprehensive model for understanding the process of character development. Table 1 portrays the integration and mapping of the components of the model of character development with the inner life and spiritual leadership (hope/faith, vision, and altruistic love) components from the spiritual leadership model. Each of these works to develop specific components of character.

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**Inner Life and Components of Character**

Developing character through spiritual leadership requires an understanding of one’s journey to move from ego-centered to other-centered to fulfill one’s ultimate purpose through love and service to others (Fry & Kriger, 2009; Keating, 1999; Tolle, 2005). It requires one to assume ownership of the spiritual journey and the courage to be open and honest with one-self. This journey requires a person to explore deep emotional needs for survival and security, affection and esteem, and power and control that may influence one’s thoughts, emotions, and behavior. It also requires exploration of one’s over attachment or over identification with any particular group or culture to which we belong (Keating, 1999). In order to do this one must cultivate an inner life practice and develop the capacity to be mindful from moment-to-moment of all one’s experience, whether, thoughts, feelings, body sensations or the mind itself. Through
mindfulness, one begins to develop and live the qualities of hope/faith, vision, and altruistic love in spiritual leadership and move towards self-actualization.

*Inner life and self-awareness.* Inner life practices of reflection, introspection, and mindfulness increases an individual’s understanding of one’s character in terms of core values, strengths and weaknesses, life’s truths and meaning, and rules to live life by. Reflective and introspective practices such as journaling, story-telling, mediating, and discussing experiences with a, sponsor, mentor or friend provide an individual a means to gain greater insight into one’s nature in terms of what is important in life, how one should live life, what provides a sense of purpose in life, how one should act, sources of thoughts, and motivation behind behavior.

Mindfulness consists of awareness, circumspection, discernment, and retention. It means to pay attention and be open to what is occurring in one’s immediate experience with care and discernment (Shapiro & Carlson, 2009). It is the knowing of your experience as you are experiencing it; knowing the state of your mind (thoughts) and emotions (feelings) without judging, evaluating, or trying to change them (Langer, 1989). To develop self-awareness through mindfulness one must learn to listen with the undivided attention of someone who wants to learn from a great teacher. The operative word here is “listen.” To listen involves letting go of the noise around and in one’s mind. Through mindfulness, one becomes aware of self-imposed inaccurate assumptions and constraints that hinder growth and also gains insight to the true path that leads to growth of potential and happiness. This ability to monitor and evaluate one’s thoughts, feelings, and behavior enhances psychological autonomy and self-awareness (Maslow, 1970).

*Inner life and sense of agency.* Leaders with agency actively engage in continuous character development through, reflection, study, and practice of developmental experiences.
Adopting an inner life practice, committing to a spiritual journey, and practicing mindfulness increases one’s sense of agency in that it entails assuming responsibility for living the core values based on spiritual leadership and to continuously strive to achieve one’s potential. It also fosters a strong self-identity grounded in love and service of others.

**Inner life and self-regulation.** Strong character involves the ability to understand and control one’s emotion’s thoughts and behavior. Knowing the source of one’s thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations is essential for self-regulation. Mindfulness enhances recognition of how these influence perception, motivation, and behavior, which enables a person to be more receptive to the present moment and free of anger, resentment, worry, and fear that may create inner disturbances that threaten self-regulation. This allows an individual to make moral judgments that are in alignment with their core values and self-identity.

**Inner life and core values and self-identity.** Through self-reflection and mindfulness individuals discover and self-author their core values and beliefs. We are handed a set of values and beliefs by our parents, teachers, faith leaders, coaches, etc.; however, to make them our own, we must reflect on and assessment them to define them for our life journey. Core values empirically associated with spiritual leadership are found in Table 2. In addition, individuals use self-reflection and mindfulness to shape their identities. Through these self-awareness processes they discover who they are and who they want to become. Reflections on personal experiences, feedback from others, and observations of role models provide individuals with insights into their identity. When one starts to use core values to define who they are and also to establish developmental goals, then core values and beliefs are becoming integrated with self-identity. This integration takes place through reflection and mindfulness and is central to the development of character.
A person’s self-identity has been shown to play a major role in cognition, motivation and behavior (MacDonald, Sulsky, & Brown, 2009). In particular, an inner life practice influences the level of self-identity to change from an independent self focus to an interdependent self focus. People with independent self focus are more likely to be ego-centered and have a self-identity based on a sense of uniqueness and achieving self-interests. An interdependent self-identity, in contrast, is based on one defining him or herself in terms of relations to others or membership in a social group. A person with an interdependent self-identity is more likely to be other-centered in viewing themselves as not being separate from the social context but as more connected and less differentiated from others, and therefore more likely to love and serve others (MacDonald et al., 2008).

**Spiritual Leadership and Components of Character.**

Referencing table 1, we propose that components of spiritual leadership: hope/faith, vision, and altruistic love, assist in the development of the character strengths of self-motivation and social awareness while working to reinforce one’s core values and self-identity.

**Hope/faith and self-motivation.** In spiritual leadership, hope/faith in a transcendent vision of love and service to key stakeholders is the primary source of self-motivation. The qualities for hope/faith for spiritual leadership include (Fry, 2003): endurance, perseverance, do what it takes, stretch goals, expectation of reward/victory, and excellence.

Hope involves the mental willpower and waypower to achieve goals (Youssef & Luthons, 2007). It is “a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful (1) agency (goal-directed energy) and (2) pathways (planning to meet goals)” (Snyder, Irving, & Anderson, 1991: 287). The “willpower” component of hope provides the determination to achieve goals, whereas the means or “waypower” component promotes the
creation of alternative paths to replace those that may have been blocked in the process of pursuing those goals. Hope as distinct measures (Snyder, 2000) and is related to performance in the workplace (Adams et al., 2002; Luthans & Jensen, 2002). Practical approaches for developing hope include setting challenging “stretch” goals, contingency planning, and re-goaling, if necessary, to avoid false hope (Luthans, Avey, et al., 2006; Snyder, 2000).

Hope is necessary but not sufficient for faith. Faith adds certainty to hope. It is the belief that what is hoped for will come to pass. In general hope/faith in something or someone is demonstrated through action or work. Often the metaphor of a race is used to describe faith working or in action (Fry, 2003; MacArthur, 1998). There are two essential components to every race: the vision and expectation of reward or victory and the joy of the journey of preparing for and running the race itself. Both of the components are necessary and essential elements of any vision that can generate hope and faith and, ultimately, self-motivation. In running the race of hope/faith, one must run to win, exercise self-control, and always strive for excellence to exceed their personal best. The race of faith is a marathon not a sprint; it requires endurance, perseverance and a willingness to “do what it takes” to do ones personal best and maximize one’s potential. Hope/faith requires setting challenging, stretch, yet achievable goals and laying aside encumbrances and distractions in pursuing the vision of the preparation, running, and ultimate victory of the race (Fry, 2003; MacArthur, 1998). Thus belief and trust in a vision is necessary for hope/faith and is the source of self-motivation for dgoal accomplishment.

As a process for character development, self-motivation in spiritual leadership produces the intrinsic forces (Fry, 2003) inside a person that integrates their core values with the self-identity to influence moral judgment. These intrinsic, self-motivating forces are created as one
gains an understanding of their self-identity and the autonomy to self-author values, attitudes, and behaviors.

**Vision and social awareness.** Vision plays an important role in leaders’ character development by assisting them in shaping their worldviews, direction in life, purpose, identity and social awareness. Vision provides leaders with the direction to take to develop their best possible selves, the reason for moving in that direction, and the motivation to continue development. Vision also influences the shaping of identity because it outlines who the leader is evolving to become along with the direction to achieve the development. An easy means to enhance self-awareness through vision is for leaders to engage in a vision exercise. The vision exercise requires leaders to identify their core values and beliefs, purpose, and, most importantly, who they want to become (possible selves). The process of identifying core values and beliefs and present and future identities assist leaders in integrating the values and identity.

At the heart of vision is the quest to step beyond self-interests and connect to and/or serve something greater than themselves. The connection to something greater can include being a member of and serving in an organization that has a mission that provides the individual a sense of purpose. Moreover, if one so believes, this connection to something greater can include an ultimate, sacred, and divine force or deity. This connection with a divine force or deity can provide people with purpose and meaning, a pro-social values system, a set of rules to live by to achieve well-being, and a source of strength and comfort during times of adversities (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

**Altruistic love and core values and self-identity.** At the heart of spiritual leadership are core values based on altruistic love (e.g., honesty, integrity, humility, courage, compassion) that provide the underpinnings for character and the cognitive and affective structures that influence
attitudes and behavior. These core values are the foundation of character and become integrated with one’s self identity, which is socially constructed and refined through years of social relations to become a relatively stable part of one’s self-system (Schlenker, 1985). This combination then influences and reinforces the consistency of ethical behavior and moral judgment.

These core values translate into principles that guide and motivate ethical conduct (Fry, 2003). For example, honesty gives rise to attitudes, behaviors, and principles in the form of specific do’s and don’ts such as: tell the truth, don’t deceive, be candid, and don’t cheat. In situations where one is confronted with conflicting values (e.g., the desire for wealth and prestige versus to be honest and kind to others), we resort to our core value system, which consists of the values we consistently rank higher than others. These values then are the source of the attitudes and, ultimately, the behaviors we choose in these situations.

**Summary and Implications for Consulting Psychologists**

Psychologists who consult with organizations have highlighted a growing need for research on the topic of character in leadership and its importance/relevance to consulting psychology (e.g., Hollenbeck, 2009; Sperry, 1999; Thompson, Grahek, Phillips, & Fay, 2008). Sperry (1999) has suggested that research in this area “must begin with an integrative operational model of character and its components that can be systematically studied” (p. 215). However, to date there are few models, tools, or processes – and therefore little empirical research, for practitioners to draw upon when it comes to character development in leadership. The integration of the West Point Model Leader Development Model with Spiritual Leadership model provides leaders and leader developers with common framework and language to understand and purposefully target character development.
References


Figure 1. Model of character development

Table 1: Integration of the components of character into the spiritual leadership model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Spiritual Leadership Model Variables</th>
<th>Components from the Model of Character Development</th>
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<td>Sense of Agency</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Self-Awareness</td>
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<td>Self-Regulation</td>
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<td>Core Values &amp; Self-Identity</td>
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<td>Core Values &amp; Self-Identity</td>
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<td>Altruistic Love</td>
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Figure 2. Model of character development through spiritual leadership.