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Graduate leadership students' perspective on including spiritual topics

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to explore working students' perspectives on the inclusion of spiritual topics in graduate leadership and management programs at secular, nonreligious, and multifaith universities. The growth in interest in spiritual issues at work and in leadership and management education suggests that spiritual topics have a role to play in leadership and management education, but this has not been systematically researched from a student perspective.

Design/methodology/approach – A total of 128 graduate students in leadership and management programs were surveyed using a 22-item rating scale-based questionnaire, with three additional open-ended items. Questions were developed from a survey of the literature.

Findings – Descriptive analysis suggests support for the inclusion of spiritual components in courses but emphasizes students' desire for an unbiased learning experience. Factor analysis not only revealed student perceptions being influenced by openness to and interest in the topic but also identified concern or fear when engaging others in the educational context. Analysis of qualitative results supported the quantitative findings but provided a richer understanding of students' perceptions of benefits (e.g. diversity awareness) and concerns (e.g. student and instructor bias).

Practical implications – This research suggests a role for spiritual topics in management and leadership programs, with appropriate caution, classroom facilitation skill and control of bias by instructors.

Originality/value – This study provides a systematic exploration of students' perspectives on the inclusion of spirituality in graduate leadership and management programs.

Keywords Religion, Leadership, Management, Education, Spirituality, Graduate

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The Spirituality at Work movement (Tourish and Tourish, 2010), as well as numerous leadership authors (e.g. Cashman, 2008; Fairholm, 1996; George, 2003, 2007), have argued that leaders bring their whole selves to leadership, including their spiritual beliefs and practices (Nash and Scott, 2009). Judge (1999) and Mitroff and Denton (1999) have emphasized how many workers and leaders view spirituality as being important to their lives or leadership. Moreover, intercultural workplaces are increasingly common and require leaders to have some ability to understand and work with followers with diverse worldviews and traditions (Edewor and Aluko, 2007; Sreedhar, 2011). It follows that many working adult leadership and management students (e.g. MBA) may be interested in spirituality as a topic in the leadership curriculum.

With the contention surrounding spirituality and religion in general (e.g. Mitroff and Denton, 1999), such inclusion may be sensitive, especially at higher education

institutions that are secular, non-religious or multi-faith in their mission, faculty appointment or student enrolment (Bradley and Kauanui, 2003). Nash and Scott (2009, p. 135) state:

> Educators must think seriously and systematically about the risks and benefits, the disadvantages and advantages, of dealing with such sensitive material in secular and private higher education institutions.

Authors such as Delbecq (2010) and Pielstick (2005) have discussed approaches to including spiritual topics in their management classes, but have not completely addressed the potential controversies surrounding such inclusion.

Even though the adult learners' experiences, needs and characteristics are recognized as essential to the process of designing instruction for them (e.g. Merriam *et al.*, 2007), little systematic research has been conducted on graduate working adult students' views on the inclusion of spiritual topics. This basic question is an important precursor to further exploration of appropriate teaching methods and approaches to engaging spirituality in the classroom. Students' perceptions have implications not only for how this topic is introduced but they may also cause instructors to reflect on their motivation and approach to teaching about spirituality. Hence, the purpose of this study was to inform discussions about instructional and curricular choices by exploring the perspectives of adult graduate management and leadership students on various issues related to the inclusion of spirituality topics in the curriculum. Specifically, we sought to explore the students' perspectives on the following research questions:

RQ1. Does spirituality have a central role for leaders and managers?

RQ2. What is the preferred role of spiritual topics in leadership and management courses?

RQ3. What guiding principles and learning activities are appropriate for presenting spiritual topics in classes and courses?

RQ4. What benefits and concerns are raised when considering the inclusion of spirituality in courses?

To further support this study, we also explored students' spiritual standing to gauge the importance of spirituality to the students, providing further insights into their interest levels in the classroom and as a means to understanding the results from *RQ1* through *RQ4*:

RQ5. What levels of spiritual identity and activity (individual and communal) exist among graduate leadership and management students?

Although debates regarding the differences between leadership and management are ongoing (Porr, 2010), we determined in this study to accept some overlap and recognize that much of the literature assumes a role for spirituality for both leaders and managers.

Spirituality in leadership and management education
The integration of spirituality into the leadership and management classroom has been a consistent issue in the literature for the past two decades. Authors seem to vary in their assumptions whether including spirituality is appropriate, necessary and value-added, which may bear some relation to the mission of the university or institution where they

are teaching (e.g. religious, previously religious, state, secular; Bradley and Kauanui, 2003). Further questions exist regarding how spirituality can be instructionally integrated. Several authors have proposed or reported on approaches to including spirituality in leadership and similar classes, such as Bento (2000), Daniels *et al.* (2000), Harlos (2000), Nash and Scott (2009), Pielstick (2005) and Delbecq (2010). This literature contains discussion on meanings of spirituality, benefits and concerns regarding the role of spirituality in the classroom, and suggestions for instructional design when integrating spirituality into leadership and management classes. As background for this study, this section only briefly reviews key themes and examples from the literature, as many comprehensive reviews are available (Grzeda and Assogbavi, 2011; Klenke, 2003; Pielstick, 2005).

Contentions over the meaning of spirituality, especially relative to religion, are regularly addressed in the literature (Dent *et al.*, 2005). Spirituality is a uniquely personal concept, which results in multiple meanings being ascribed (Freshman, 1999). Boje (2000) and Bradley and Kauanui (2003, based on Boje) provide a taxonomy of spiritualities, expanding beyond traditional religious spiritualities to include humanist, cultist, post-modern self-affirming and post-modern sceptics. Many of the spiritualities, including religious and non-religious, are likely to be present amongst students in non-religious, secular or multi-faith leadership classrooms, creating unique challenges for instructors in this environment; there will also be a range of spiritual perspectives among instructors in these environments.

Given the complex considerations when engaging spirituality in the classroom, a number of suggestions have been made for the design of courses focused on incorporating spirituality. For example, Delbecq (2010) and Marcic (2000) have proposed that relative to the diversity present in the modern workplace, a survey of different religious and spiritual traditions and practices should be included. Marcic (2000), Pielstick (2005) and Delbecq (2010) each suggest specific activities, readings and assignments. Some authors include specific practices, such as meditation or contemplative prayer in classroom activities (e.g. Delbecq; Pielstick), whereas others note the need for privacy and acceptance of difference (Allen & Williams, 2011; Barnett *et al.*, 2000). Barnett *et al.* (2000, p. 564) propose that educators:

> […] teach students about spirituality by changing our usual professional focus away from the course content (i.e. spirituality *per se*, which is for all intents and purposes unknowable) and instead toward the instructional process that enables students to learn how to learn about their own spirituality.

Delbecq (2010) emphasizes this focus on lived experience.

A number of benefits and concerns are highlighted in the literature. Klenke (2003) discusses various concerns about the inclusion of spirituality in leadership and management classes, noting the personal nature of spirituality and the potential for students' discomfort during discussions of spirituality in the leadership classroom. Marcic (2000) highlights the potential for instructors to be seen to be proselytizing when being authentic in their religious or spiritual expression. Klenke (2003, p. 57) also mentions the need to avoid spiritual topics being seen as "dogmatic, prescriptive or offensive".

The benefits of engaging spirituality in the classroom include development of skills to work with diverse others (Pielstick, 2005), self-knowledge and reflection

(Haroutiounian *et al.*, 2000), authenticity and personal effectiveness as a leader (Levy, 2000) and enhancements to the leader's resilience, sense of meaning and balance (Judge, 1999). However, these benefits are all based on subjective reports.

There is not only a lack of systematic research on the benefits of including spirituality in leadership education but also many challenges with research methods and scientific "ways of knowing" when considering the nature of spirituality (Dean *et al.*, 2003; Franz and Wong, 2005). It is important to note that all of the articles cited in this paper are class case studies, generally based on an assumption that students are interested and that the topic is appropriate to the curriculum. In this study, we attempt to broaden the focus from the single class to surveying students across multiple programs, instructors and classes, where spirituality has not already been introduced as a class topic. Despite the discussions of spirituality in the literature on leadership and management education, we did not identify studies that specifically investigated students' perspectives regarding the inclusion of spirituality in secular, non-religious or multi-faith programs. The intended outcome of this research is to create greater awareness and understanding of students' perspectives and to use this information to maximize any benefits of including spirituality in the curriculum through better instructional and curriculum design.

Method
To explore students' perspectives on the inclusion of spiritual topics, 128 adult graduate leadership and management students completed an online questionnaire that included both rating scale-based and open-ended questions.

Participants
A total of 515 graduate working adult students enrolled at a business school at a non-profit Californian university were invited by email to participate in this study. A sample of 128 working adult students completed the survey, resulting in a total response rate of 25 per cent. All sampled students were enrolled in masters ($n = 113$) and doctoral ($n = 15$) programs. Although the university has a historical relationship to a Christian denomination, the university accepts students and faculty of all religions, resulting in a distinctively multi-faith campus. Classes in the business school can be described as non-religious or secular. Students were drawn from four programs in either business (e.g. MBA) or public administration ($n = 46$) or leadership and management ($n = 82$), all of which include courses in leadership. One demographic item was included in the online survey to identify the students' program of study. No other demographic information was collected to simplify the survey and encourage participation. The researchers do not work in the programs that were sampled, reducing the chances that students would feel concerned to express their views.

Procedure
In late fall of 2011, after institutional review board approval, students were sent an email invitation by the relevant academic program directors with a link to our anonymous online survey. One reminder email was sent. Participants were presented with an introduction, survey instructions and a consent form, before the survey questions. Being aware of the contentions surrounding the meaning of the word *spirituality*, we chose to provide our research sample with an inclusive definition of spirituality that used

accessible language (Tanyi, 2002, p. 506), which expressly embraces a broad range of spiritualities:

> Spirituality is a personal search for meaning and purpose in life, which may or may not be related to religion. It entails connection to self-chosen and or religious beliefs, values, and practices that give meaning to life, thereby inspiring and motivating individuals to achieve their optimal being. This connection brings faith, hope, peace, and empowerment. The results are joy, forgiveness of oneself and others, awareness and acceptance of hardship and mortality, a heightened sense of physical and emotional well-being, and the ability to transcend beyond the infirmities of existence.

The instructions included Tanyi's (2002) definition with the explanation:

> Our goal is to better understand students' thoughts and feelings about including spiritual topics in graduate leadership and management programs. The focus of our research is on […] institutions that include students of all spiritual belief groups and do not require a specific belief or membership in a religion or spiritual group […]. Spirituality has many different meanings for people. Read this description before continuing.

Instrument
The questionnaire consisted of 22 rating scale items from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), and three open-ended questions. We developed an initial item pool focused on concepts and issues gleaned from the literature to address: students' personal spiritual standing (students' perception of themselves as spiritual individuals and level of active engagement in their spiritual lives, individually or communally); students' perceptions on the role of spirituality in leadership (in general); students' views on the preferred role of spirituality in their leadership education, including the appropriate format for presenting spiritual topics in classes and courses; and students' opinions on the benefits and concerns regarding the inclusion of spirituality. The following is an example of an item, "Spiritual topics should be included as a part of graduate leadership or management courses". The rating scale items included five reverse scored items (to reduce acquiescence). The survey was piloted with a sample of eight researchers and graduates, before the questionnaire was finalized. Two of the open-ended questions focused on students' perceptions of benefits and concerns "about including sections on spiritual topics in courses that develop leaders and managers". The third open-ended question asked participants for general comments and suggestions. Table I includes paraphrased descriptions of the rating scale items (not actual items). The actual wording of the items is available from the authors for appropriate research purposes.

Analysis
In line with the exploratory nature of the enquiry, our quantitative data analysis initially focused on descriptive statistics by simply identifying trends in students' attitudes in the above-mentioned categories. Tests of difference between programs were not practical with the sample size, but a review of the means suggested little difference between the programs and levels (doctoral vs masters). Factor analysis was then used to identify the latent variables (Costello and Osbourne, 2005) underlying the students' response to the questionnaire, with the objective to clarify key contributors to attitudes on the inclusion of spiritual themes in their leadership education.

Brief item descriptions	n	M	SD
Personal spiritual standing			
Consider self to be spiritual	128	5.72	1.59
Student is actively involved in spiritual life (individually/communally)	128	5.27	1.83
Role of spirituality in leadership			
Importance of personal spiritual beliefs to leaders	127	5.65	1.64
Spirituality increasingly relevant topic for leaders/managers	127	5.17	1.67
Spiritual beliefs/practices influence leaders daily	126	5.94	1.27
Perspective on including spiritual topics in leadership/management course			
Spiritual reflection will aid growth as a leader/manager	125	5.54	1.64
Include spiritual topics in graduate leadership/management course	128	4.79	1.77
Prefer to engage spirituality outside of graduate studies	125	4.22	1.77
Interested in learning skills for working with others with different beliefs	126	5.71	1.23
Would withdraw from class if spiritual topics included	126	2.67	1.78
Would consider taking elective on spirituality and leadership	126	5.16	1.97
Spirituality sections of leadership/management course should be optional	128	5.16	1.73
How spiritual topics should be included in classes			
Diverse/representative group of leaders as guest speakers on spirituality in life/leadership	128	5.23	1.95
Assignment where students individually chose spiritual practice to attempt/learn	128	4.77	1.94
Writing assignment on spiritual beliefs/practices in development as a leader	128	4.73	2.03
Spirituality's role for historical/successful leaders	125	5.82	1.42
Learning about student peers' spiritual beliefs/experiences	126	4.92	1.68
Instructors speaking on spirituality in own life/leadership	126	4.85	1.74
Instructor should set ground rules for class including spiritual topics	126	5.41	1.30
Concerns			
Spirituality discussions in class will result in negative emotion/tension	128	3.45	1.64
Uncomfortable/anxious when sharing spiritual views in class	128	2.96	1.88
Concerned about disrespect of spiritual choices/beliefs in class	125	3.29	1.62

Table I.
Descriptive analysis
of results

For open-ended response items, we individually open coded a portion of the students' responses, reviewed our codes against the full data set and created a single working code book. Then, we worked together to code the full set of the responses, modifying code definitions, identifying key exemplars and noting the frequency of the codes, eventually extracting salient themes related to the benefits and concerns that students perceived.

Quantitative findings
Descriptive analysis of the responses to the rating scale items revealed the means and standard deviations in Table I. Below are some key observations about these data.

The highest means with smallest standard deviations are "Spiritual beliefs/practices influence leaders daily" (M = 5.94; SD = 1.27) and "[I would be] interested in learning skills for working with others with different beliefs" (M = 5.71; SD = 1.23), which may indicate fairly uniform agreement that spirituality is relevant to leadership education. Items with the largest standard deviation are "[I would be interested in an] assignment where students individually choose a spiritual practice to attempt/learn" (SD = 1.94), "[I] would consider taking an elective on spirituality and leadership" (SD = 1.97) and

"[I would be interested in a] writing assignment on spiritual beliefs/practices in my development as a leader" (SD = 2.03), indicating less agreement on these methods of incorporating spiritual topics in the curriculum.

To gain an understanding of deeper considerations influencing students' responses to the individual items, we factor analyzed the 22 items. Following the guidance of Costello and Osbourne (2005), four items were removed from the principal components factor analysis to create a clear two-factor solution (all loadings > 0.70, cross-loadings < 0.39) accounting for 54 and 10 per cent of the variance (n = 123). Items loading on Factor 1 related to a general interest in and openness to learning about spirituality in growing as a leader and manager. Factor 2 reflected a fear or discomfort when considering the inclusion of spiritual topics in a management or leadership class, with an emphasis on discomfort when engaging others (e.g. fear of conflict or being disrespected) and a preference for spiritual learning or growth outside of graduate education (e.g. preference of privacy).

Although this questionnaire was not developed to measure a single construct, but rather to explore students' more general perspectives, a Cronbach's alpha (internal reliability) of 0.95 was computed for the 18 item version of scale. Minimum item-total correlations of 0.37 were found with 67 per cent of the items having item-total correlations above 0.70, suggesting potential for further development of a shortened scale.

Qualitative findings

In response to the open-ended questions regarding benefits and concerns, 91 students responded with benefits and 81 respondents contributed concerns. The level of response, in both frequency and length, to these qualitative questions suggested students' strong interest in the research and expressing their views. Only themes with frequencies greater than 10 per cent (n = 13) of the sample are reported below, with paraphrased examples of responses.

The most frequent perceived benefit (n = 35) was engaging the whole person in leadership growth, including recognition that: spirituality is foundational to many leaders' and followers' identities and that spirituality influences leaders, which includes recognition of spirituality's role in historical leaders' lives (e.g. "Spirituality is a part of life. Why would we exclude a topic that plays a major role in the decisions we make as people?"). The second most mentioned benefit was cultural and diversity awareness (n = 33), described as a necessity in the evolving diverse workplace (e.g. "Social and narrative constructs affect how direct reports, co-workers, and customers make decisions, we as leaders and managers cannot shy away from the often conflictual difficulties involved"). The third salient benefit (n = 24) was mutual understanding resulting in group cohesion and an appreciation of what creates meaning for others and motivates their actions (e.g. "It helps leaders understand those who they work with"). Additional themes included: developing the authenticity of students' leadership by integrating chosen spiritual beliefs and practices (n = 15), growth of leaders guided by ethical or moral practices and conscience-rooted spirituality (n = 14) and general skills development of leaders (n = 14) including the ability to facilitate dialogue in challenging and diverse situations and to identify shared meaning and purpose.

The most mentioned concern was potential for student bias (n = 43) with frequent statements regarding intolerance, disrespect, zealous behavior, lack of openness, proselytizing or offensive reactions (e.g. "students will not be as open-minded, sensitive, and respectful").The second most raised concern was instructor bias (n = 30) relating to lack of awareness of varied religions, proselytizing, presenting biased content or

instructor-centric teaching ("Some instructors may try to influence students into their way of thinking"). Closely related to these concerns is a fear of heated arguments or out-of-control discussions ($n = 16$). The fourth theme ($n = 15$) highlighted students' concerns regarding classes lacking clear ground rules (e.g. principles of equity, freedom, mutual respect, hospitality, emphasis on learning and discourse).

Discussion

Majorities agreed that personal spiritual beliefs are an important part of being a leader (78.7 per cent, $n = 127$); a leader's daily thoughts, behavior, attitudes and values are influenced by their spiritual beliefs and practices (84.9 per cent, $n = 126$); and reflections on the student's spiritual life will help them grow as a leader and manager (79.2 per cent, $n = 125$). In the minds of most of these adult students, spirituality plays a role in leadership, which is consistent with previous findings such as those by Judge (1999).

It is also interesting to note that 82 per cent ($n = 128$) of students consider themselves to be spiritual and 73.4 per cent ($n = 128$) are active individually or communally in their spiritual lives. These two items loaded (0.75 and 0.71, respectively) onto the interest-openness factor revealed in the principal components analysis, supporting a connection between personal spiritual standing and interest in learning about spirituality in leadership and management. These results support Nash and Scott's (2009) assertions regarding the importance of spirituality to leaders.

This study reveals that the students we surveyed, on the whole, would value the inclusion of spiritual topics in management and leadership classes but have some apprehensions regarding how this is implemented. Only 15.9 per cent of students ($n = 126$) agreed (slightly through strongly) that they would drop a class if spiritual topics were included. In contrast, 63.3 per cent ($n = 128$) of students agreed that spiritual topics should be included in graduate leadership and management classes. Most (73 per cent, $n = 126$) agreed that they would take an elective on the topic, whereas 40 per cent ($n = 125$) agreed that they would prefer to engage their spirituality outside of their graduate education.

In essence, these findings partly support the assumptions of previous authors such as Delbecq (2010) and Pielstick (2005) who chose to focus on spirituality as part of leadership class and programs, but suggest that some students may prefer to opt out or be given alternatives. In addition, interest in the topic is likely to be related to the students' expectations of what the topic includes and how the course might be taught. Therefore, instructors should be cautious in assuming that the present sample's interest in the topic supports the addition or continued inclusion of spiritual themes. Further course based evaluation and research into best practice may also narrow the gap between students' expectations and instructors' delivery.

The individual items of our survey reveal complex patterns in the students' responses, but the factor analysis suggests two primary considerations underlying the students' response:

(1) an interest and openness to the topic; and

(2) a fear or apprehension as to what might happen in the class (between students or between students and the instructor).

To some degree, these factors mimic classic categories of benefit versus risks, often considered in decision-making. Returning to Freshman's (1999) views, this topic occupies a

unique position within students' individual identities, possibly resulting in the tension of interest in self-discovery and apprehension when encountering others' identities.

Regarding the actual learning activities that students would be interested in engaging while learning about spirituality and leadership, we noted a generally positive attitude toward most of the proposed activities (e.g. writing assignments, diverse and representative group of guest speakers, studying the role of spirituality in historical leaders' lives), supporting the finding that most students display an interest and openness to spiritual topics. The items used in the survey were crafted with consideration of the activities noted in previous literature (Pielstick, 2005), but were carefully worded to suit the multi-faith environment. In essence, we, as researchers, were proposing activities that we believed would be appealing to students of both religious and non-religious backgrounds, hoping to isolate any specific activities that were a concern for students. More controversial activities (e.g. meditation in class) are proposed in the literature (Delbecq, 2010), which also might be a useful subject for future research with similar audiences.

Although the rating scale items in the questionnaire allowed us to examine some of the perceived benefits and concerns (e.g. through students expressing whether they would want a specific activity included in a class), the open-ended questions were the most valuable in terms of students' outlining their views on the issue because they were able to use their own words, revealing a richer perspective on student views. Clearly, students see benefits (e.g. whole person growth, awareness and skills in working with diversity) and concerns (e.g. student and instructor bias), but most see a role for the inclusion spirituality, despite some risk.

Limitations
This was an exploratory study, and, as such, the conclusions are tentative. The results may not apply to other groups. The order of the rating scale versus open-ended items in the questionnaire may have resulted in some benefits and concerns mentioned in the rated items (Items 1-22), influencing responses to the open-ended questions (Items 23-24). We also recognize that the sample could have some self-selection bias where participants have an affinity toward the inclusion of spirituality issues and topics. Future studies relying on a purely qualitative method using purposeful sampling might expose more divergent patterns. Repetition of the study at similar universities (e.g. secular, non-religious or multi-faith), in other countries and across various types of programs (e.g. engineering management, educational leadership and non-leadership programs) is needed to confirm the significance of the patterns revealed in students' interests and concerns. Although this study may inform curricular decisions, it would be advisable to collect more information about the views of other constituents (e.g. faculty, employers) before making changes in any specific program.

Practical implications
With the majority of students having positive but qualified perceptions of the inclusion of spirituality in classes, instructors may need to examine both their motivation for including it and the way the topic is introduced and integrated into programs to ensure that students come to the learning task with an optimistic rather than a defensive perspective. This study highlights the need for instructors to be self-aware and to utilize effective facilitation skills, so that expressed concerns regarding bias and heated conversations are not realized. For example, one participant wrote, "My largest concern is that the instructor will lose control of

the discussion". Participants expressed concern for potentially destructive behavior of both their peers and of their instructors. In doing so, concern for peers' well-being was also expressed: "the debate will degrade to the point that people may feel attacked and/or alienated". These concerns seem to be both an acknowledgement of the sensitivity of the topic and a recognition that (at least some) instructors are not sufficiently skilled or unbiased to attempt such inclusion (relative to the secular, non-religious or multi-faith context). It is equally important to note that entirely safe classrooms are not realistic or desirable (Rom, 1998). By suggesting the need for ground rules, students could also be implying that such ground rules are often absent in discussion of sensitive topics. An instructor teaching a class with spiritual components may model effective workplace skills that students can use when in future leadership roles, including reducing fears of engagement of diverse perspectives. Hicks (2010) provides a useful framework for engaging spirituality in the workplace (e.g. inclusion, non-establishment, non-degradation, non-coercion), which provides ground rules that instructors could adapt for use in the classroom. In addition, alternative assignments, respecting individual choice (e.g. classroom participation) and self-directed study are important considerations to accommodate the variety of levels of interest, openness and apprehension likely to present amongst students. As previously recommended (Williams & Allen, 2014), instructors should also avoid spirituality becoming out of proportion to other topics in the syllabus.

Conclusion

This study supports the idea that many students perceive connections between spirituality, leadership and management and see the inclusion of spirituality in graduate leadership and management courses as appropriate and interesting. Clear patterns emerged in the benefits that students noted (e.g. working in diversity). However, students also highlight clear concerns and appear to support the inclusion of unbiased assignments, classroom activities and learning content that ensures safety in the classroom. How spiritual topics are introduced and included appears to be as important as whether to include them. Instructional and curriculum design might maximize the number of students interested in and willing to enroll in a course that includes spiritual topics, as well as strengthening the impact of the learning. It is also clear that some student may prefer to be selectively involved in portions of courses that focus on spirituality – perhaps preferring to listen and learn while engaging more privately.

Spirituality continues to be a topic of interest to leadership and management educators, practitioners and students. Many leaders and students gain considerable inspiration, guidance and meaning from spiritual beliefs and practices, whether religious or non-religious. Further research is needed to more completely understand student perspectives to contribute to best practices in leadership and management education in secular, non-religious and multi-faith programs. However, this study provides an initial and exploratory attempt at systematically investigating students' perspectives on this popular topic.

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