



Leading With Purpose: The Transformative Impact of Servant, Authentic, and Spiritual Leadership on Workplace Well-Being and Ethics

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Abstract

This study investigates the transformative potential of servant, authentic, and spiritual leadership models in modern organizations, emphasizing their role in fostering workplace well-being, ethical decision making, and organizational commitment. By employing a systematic literature review methodology, this research synthesizes existing scholarship to explore how these leadership styles promote values such as empathy, transparency, and integrity, aligning individual purpose with organizational objectives. The analysis identifies specific mechanisms through which servant leadership enhances community and ethical climates, authentic leadership fosters empowerment in high-stress environments, and spiritual leadership integrates intrinsic motivation with collective purpose. A focused problem statement highlights gaps in understanding the cultural adaptability of these leadership models in hierarchical and high-power-distance settings. Findings reveal that these value-driven approaches significantly improve job satisfaction, reduce turnover, and enhance ethical climates. The study concludes that servant, authentic, and spiritual leadership form a comprehensive framework that promotes ethical behavior, well-being, and a profound sense of purpose within organizations. By prioritizing values such as empathy, transparency, and integrity, these leadership models establish environments where employees are motivated to exceed expectations, thus benefiting organizational success and contributing to societal well-being.

Keywords: servant leadership, workplace spirituality, authentic leadership, spiritual leadership, ethical leadership

1. Introduction

In the contemporary, intricate, and swiftly changing workplace, leadership is essential for both fostering organizational success and influencing the ethical and psychological atmosphere of the work environment. Servant, authentic, and spiritual leadership models have garnered

significant attention for their focus on ethical conduct, personal growth, and a profound dedication to the welfare of followers (Chaudhary, 2020; Fry et al., 2007). These leadership styles deviate from conventional, performance-oriented models by emphasizing values such as empathy, integrity, and service, thereby cultivating a culture of trust, inclusivity, and mutual respect inside businesses (McClellan, 2009; Tanno & Banner, 2018).

This study examines contemporary leadership models as comprehensive approaches that emphasize both organizational objectives and employee development, analyzing how each framework tackles the intricacies of modern workplace dynamics. Servant leadership, based on the principle of leaders serving their followers, prioritizes community development and the personal growth of employees (Greenleaf, 1977). Authentic leadership, emphasizing transparency and ethical clarity, fosters trust and empowerment, particularly in high-pressure and morally complex environments (Wong & Laschinger, 2013). Spiritual leadership provides a means for individuals to synchronize their own values with company objectives, producing a significant and organically inspiring workplace (Fry et al., 2007).

The study explores the ideas, practices, and effects of servant, authentic, and spiritual leadership, elucidating their contributions to ethical decision making, improved job satisfaction, and a culture of well-being. As firms progressively pursue sustainable and value-oriented growth, these leadership strategies possess the capacity to transform workplaces, fostering an environment where employees feel appreciated and inspired to accomplish collective objectives (Naseer et al., 2019; Otaye-Ebede et al., 2019). In a time when employees value purpose and authenticity in their work, comprehending the influence of various leadership styles is crucial for cultivating resilient, engaged, and ethically oriented teams (Belwalkar et al., 2018; Jacobs, 2006).

2. Methodology

The methodology for this literature review was designed to systematically explore the relationship between servant, authentic, and spiritual leadership models and their transformative impacts on workplace well-being, job satisfaction, and ethics. The review concentrated on these three leadership models due to their shared emphasis on ethical frameworks, employee well-being, and workplace spirituality. These models were selected because of their potential to address organizational challenges while promoting intrinsic motivation and ethical decision-making.

To gather relevant studies, a comprehensive search was conducted using academic databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, and Scopus. Keywords like “servant leadership,” “authentic leadership,” “spiritual leadership,” “workplace spirituality,” “ethical leadership,” and “job satisfaction” guided the search process. The scope of the review included studies published between 2000 and 2023 to ensure the inclusion of contemporary research while integrating foundational theories. This approach ensured the literature was both current and grounded in well-established scholarship.

The inclusion criteria focused on studies that examined the impact of these leadership styles on workplace ethics and spirituality, with particular attention to cultural adaptability and measurable outcomes such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Empirical studies that demonstrated practical applications and meaningful insights were prioritized. Conversely, studies lacking empirical evidence or focusing solely on theoretical development without application to workplace settings were excluded. This approach ensured that the review remained relevant and actionable.

The literature was synthesized using thematic analysis to identify and organize key themes. Major themes included the role of workplace spirituality in enhancing leadership outcomes, the ethical and motivational dimensions of servant and authentic leadership, and the comparative impacts of these leadership styles on organizational culture. The studies were critically evaluated for their methodological rigor, theoretical underpinnings, and alignment with the review's objectives. Special attention was given to the mediating role of workplace spirituality and the contextual adaptability of leadership models across industries and cultural environments.

Throughout the review process, gaps in the literature were identified. One significant gap was the limited research on the cultural adaptability of these leadership styles, particularly in hierarchical or high-power-distance organizations. Additionally, there was a paucity of studies examining the integration of spiritual leadership in diverse organizational contexts. These gaps provided opportunities for future research to extend the understanding of how these leadership styles can be effectively applied in varied cultural and organizational settings. Finally, the findings from the selected studies were synthesized into a cohesive narrative. This synthesis emphasized the synergies among servant, authentic, and spiritual leadership styles, highlighting their collective potential to foster ethical, inclusive, and purpose-driven workplaces. By integrating insights from across the literature, this review establishes a robust foundation for advancing leadership practices that prioritize well-being and ethical conduct, while also identifying areas for further exploration and research.

3. Thematic Analysis and Discussion

3.1 Overview of Servant Leadership and Workplace Spiritual Leadership Styles

Authentic leadership, rooted in self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and an internalized moral perspective, has garnered significant attention for its positive impact on employee engagement, organizational culture, and performance. In healthcare, authentic leadership is particularly valued, as it creates supportive environments that enhance job satisfaction and performance. For example, Wong and Laschinger (2013) found that among Canadian nurses, authentic leaders fostered transparency and upheld ethical standards, which contributed to empowerment, positive job outcomes, and overall well-being.

Closely related to authentic leadership, servant leadership and workplace spirituality emphasize ethical and value-driven work environments, promoting employee engagement and fulfillment (Greenleaf, 1977; McClellan, 2009). Servant leadership, in particular, prioritizes a leader's role as a servant to others, focusing on the well-being and professional development of followers over self-interest (Matteson & Irving, 2005). By integrating values such as empathy, ethical guidance, and relational transparency, servant leaders help cultivate a psychologically safe atmosphere, fostering trust and openness among employees (Tanno & Banner, 2018). Together, these leadership models contribute to a workplace that supports employee growth and ethical behavior, highlighting the importance of value-based leadership in modern organizations.

3.2 Servant Leadership: Key Components and Impact on Employee Engagement

The principles of servant leadership, as developed by Greenleaf (1977), emphasize selfless service, authenticity, and stewardship. By focusing on building supportive communities, servant leaders cultivate environments where employees feel valued and supported, which promotes high engagement and trust (McClellan, 2009). According to Reddy (2018), this leadership style encourages deeper connections among individuals in the workplace, ultimately

enhancing morale and reducing turnover through heightened job satisfaction. Servant leadership, therefore, extends beyond traditional managerial roles to foster a culture where personal well-being is prioritized alongside organizational goals (Reddy, 2018).

Moreover, research suggests that servant leadership fosters ethical decision making by prioritizing the welfare of employees and communities over profit maximization (Otake-Ebede et al., 2019). Through transparent practices and ethical behavior modeling, servant leaders shape organizational ethics and create a culture that empowers employees to act in the best interests of both the organization and society (Powell, 2003).

Closely linked to servant leadership is the concept of workplace spirituality, which positively impacts both individual job satisfaction and overall organizational performance. Otake-Ebede et al. (2019) found that organizations with high levels of workplace spirituality experience improved ethical climates, increased prosocial motivation, and enhanced team performance. In promoting a spiritual and ethical workplace, servant leaders encourage prosocial behaviors, such as cooperation and helping others, which contribute to greater productivity and stronger organizational commitment.

Supporting these findings, Naseer et al. (2019) noted that spiritual workplaces can reduce stress and increase job involvement by fostering a supportive culture where ethical behavior is valued and nurtured. Such environments are strengthened when leaders demonstrate humility and ethical integrity, signaling a culture of mutual respect that upholds both individual well-being and organizational ethics (Naseer et al., 2019). Together, these studies highlight how servant leadership and workplace spirituality create a holistic approach to leadership that enhances both individual fulfillment and organizational success.

3.3 Authentic Leadership and Workplace Spirituality

Workplace spirituality, characterized by employees' pursuit of purpose, interconnectedness, and value alignment, enhances authentic leadership's ability to foster intrinsic motivation. Jacobs (2006) highlighted that authentic leaders who exhibit servant leadership qualities create environments where employees feel appreciated, boosting commitment and performance. This leadership style encourages employees to engage in meaningful work and demonstrate organizational citizenship behaviors, reinforcing the integration of personal and organizational values (Jacobs, 2006).

When workplace spirituality is embedded within an organization's culture, it strengthens employee commitment. For instance, Belwalkar et al. (2018) found a positive correlation between workplace spirituality and job satisfaction, particularly in settings that cultivate trust and a strong sense of community. Their findings underscore the importance of a spiritually grounded workplace in encouraging organizational citizenship behaviors, further aligning employees with the company's mission (Belwalkar et al., 2018).

Creating a work environment that allows individuals to find meaning, interconnectedness, and fulfillment is central to workplace spirituality (Pirkola et al., 2016). In fields like healthcare and law enforcement, fostering spirituality is critical for enhancing job satisfaction and mitigating burnout, as it encourages personal alignment with organizational values (Moran, 2017; Pirkola et al., 2016). This sense of transcendence also enables employees to contribute toward broader societal goals, further increasing job satisfaction (Naseer et al., 2019).

Moreover, in servant-led organizations, workplace spirituality aligns well with leadership styles that emphasize service, fostering a sense of purpose among employees. Reddy (2018) suggested that workplace spirituality complements servant leadership by promoting well-

being, job satisfaction, and ethical conduct, reinforcing a culture where employees feel their work is impactful and fulfilling.

3.4 Mediating Role of Workplace Spirituality, Servant Leadership, and Self-Transcendence

Empowerment has been widely recognized as a key mediator between authentic leadership and job satisfaction. Wong and Laschinger (2013) found that authentic leadership fosters nurses' engagement, performance, and satisfaction through empowerment, suggesting that when leaders are genuine and transparent, they enable employees to feel more engaged and fulfilled. This finding aligns with research by Hassan et al. (2016), who demonstrated that trust—cultivated through workplace spirituality—significantly mediates the relationship between spirituality and satisfaction. Together, these studies highlight a synergy between authentic leadership and workplace spirituality, building a strong foundation for creating ethical, fulfilling, and high-performing work environments.

Similarly, servant leadership, as developed by Greenleaf (1977), emphasizes the leader's role as a servant to their followers, prioritizing their growth, empowerment, and autonomy. Servant leaders are committed to the needs of their followers and work to create environments that foster empathy, healing, and ethical behavior (Sun & Shang, 2019). This leadership approach is particularly effective in promoting interpersonal trust and a shared sense of purpose, as it aligns individual values with organizational goals (Norman, 2015). Servant leadership's self-transcendent focus—where leaders prioritize the welfare of others over personal gain—distinguishes it from traditional transactional leadership models, making it an ideal approach for cultivating ethical and purpose-driven workplaces (Shek & Lin, 2015).

3.5 Self-Transcendence and Ethical Leadership

Research underscores the pivotal role of self-transcendence in leadership frameworks, particularly within social activism and ethical domains. Barton and Hart (2023) defined self-transcendence as the expansion of personal boundaries to connect with broader social and ethical concerns, which motivates both leaders and employees to pursue altruistic objectives. This quality, intrinsic to authentic leadership, strengthens leaders' adherence to ethical standards, creating a culture of mutual respect and integrity (Barton & Hart, 2023). Likewise, Esfahani (2015) highlighted the connection between spiritual intelligence and transformational leadership, noting the shared qualities with authentic leadership, such as an emphasis on ethical guidance and purpose-driven action.

At its core, authentic leadership is characterized by self-awareness, balanced processing of information, relational transparency, and a commitment to moral principles. These qualities enhance followers' perceptions of organizational integrity and align with Corporate Social Responsibility values, fostering an ethical workplace culture (Chaudhary, 2020). By consistently acting according to their values and maintaining transparency, authentic leaders build credibility and trust within their teams. Norman (2015) further suggested that such authentic leadership not only enhances organizational trust but also strengthens employees' identification with CSR initiatives, leading to increased job satisfaction and a heightened sense of purpose. Additionally, the alignment of authentic leadership with CSR principles supports long-term employee commitment, as they feel their work positively contributes to society (Tecchio et al., 2016).

3.6 Leadership and Job Performance: The Role of Proactive Behavior

The model's relevance across industries is further supported by research linking authentic leadership, proactive behavior, and job performance. Gustari and Widodo (2024) found that ethical leadership positively influences job performance through fostering workplace spirituality and proactive behavior, giving organizations a strategic edge through a highly committed workforce. Authentic leaders, who emphasize shared values and organizational commitment, encourage proactive behavior, prompting employees to exceed role expectations and contributing to enhanced job performance.

Spiritual leadership, which incorporates aspects of both servant and authentic leadership, promotes a sense of higher purpose, meaning, and interconnectedness within organizations. According to Fry et al. (2007), spiritual leadership supports organizational spirituality by helping employees align their personal values with the organization's mission, enhancing intrinsic motivation as employees feel their work contributes to a greater good. This approach fosters values like integrity, altruism, and compassion, essential elements for a supportive and ethically driven workplace environment (Tecchio et al., 2016).

Workplace spirituality has gained recognition as an asset in organizational settings, enhancing employees' sense of purpose and emotional well-being. Leadership models such as servant, authentic, and spiritual leadership align with the principles of workplace spirituality, encouraging self-actualization and ethical behavior (Tecchio et al., 2016). Shek and Lin (2015) further noted that workplace spirituality, when integrated with leadership models that prioritize employee well-being, results in increased job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and reduced burnout. This synergy between leadership and spirituality not only aids in talent retention but also elevates morale, as employees feel more connected to their work and its broader societal impact.

3.7 Practical Implications and Future Directions

The integration of authentic and servant leadership in culturally diverse workplaces presents unique challenges, particularly when considering workplace spirituality. One of the key concerns is that authentic leadership, which emphasizes relational transparency, may not be easily embraced in high-power-distance cultures where employees are less likely to provide open feedback. To navigate this, organizations must implement culturally sensitive leadership practices that encourage openness in ways that align with local norms. Rather than expecting employees to engage in direct, transparent communication, leaders can introduce alternative feedback mechanisms such as anonymous surveys, structured one-on-one meetings, or culturally adapted mentoring programs. These approaches allow for relational transparency while respecting hierarchical norms and ensuring that employees feel safe expressing their thoughts in a manner that aligns with their cultural expectations.

In addition to leadership styles, organizations must be mindful of how workplace spirituality is perceived within different industries and cultural contexts. In some professional settings, spirituality may be seen as misaligned with traditional business practices, making it difficult to implement overt spiritual initiatives. A practical solution is to embed spirituality into corporate values and ethical decision-making frameworks rather than framing it as a religious or spiritual practice. By fostering purpose-driven leadership, offering mindfulness programs, and encouraging ethical reflection, organizations can integrate workplace spirituality in an inclusive and nonintrusive manner. Employees should have the flexibility to engage with these initiatives voluntarily, ensuring that those who do not identify with spiritual values do not feel pressured to participate. This approach allows for the benefits of workplace spirituality to be realized while respecting diverse professional and cultural perspectives.

For servant leadership to be effective in diverse organizational settings, it is essential to adopt a multilevel approach that integrates these principles at various tiers within the company. Leaders must ensure that workplace spirituality is not confined to senior executives but is instead embedded throughout corporate policies, performance management systems, and leadership training programs. Encouraging middle managers to act as cultural intermediaries can further bridge the gap between servant leadership principles and organizational realities. This means equipping managers with the tools to model servant leadership in ways that resonate with their teams, whether through mentorship, active listening, or advocacy for employees' professional growth. By tailoring the application of servant leadership to different organizational levels, companies can create a more inclusive leadership culture that fosters engagement and ethical decision making.

In hierarchical, high-power-distance organizations, traditional servant leadership approaches may need to be adapted to fit the existing power structures. Since participatory decision making and open dialogue may not be culturally acceptable in these settings, leaders should focus on demonstrating servant leadership through their actions rather than relying solely on rhetoric. Prioritizing employee well-being, advocating for professional development, and ensuring equitable access to resources can effectively convey servant leadership values without directly challenging hierarchical norms. Additionally, implementing structured pathways for employee feedback—such as confidential reporting systems or indirect consultation processes—can help employees feel heard while maintaining organizational harmony. By aligning servant leadership principles with cultural expectations, organizations can create an environment where leaders serve employees effectively without disrupting traditional power dynamics.

Given the limited research on workplace spirituality across different cultural and industry contexts, further empirical studies are needed to develop best practices for integrating authentic and servant leadership in diverse settings. Organizations can collaborate with academic institutions to conduct case studies that examine successful adaptations of these leadership models in various cultural and hierarchical environments. Such research can provide valuable insights into the nuances of leadership and spirituality in the workplace, helping businesses refine their strategies to enhance employee motivation, engagement, and ethical decision making. By fostering a deeper understanding of how these leadership principles interact with cultural diversity, organizations can create more inclusive and effective leadership frameworks that balance workplace spirituality with organizational and cultural realities.

Although authentic leadership offers valuable benefits, it also faces notable challenges in culturally diverse contexts, where values and expectations may vary widely. Lee et al. (2013) suggested that workplace spirituality can provide flexibility for authentic leadership across different cultural settings, emphasizing that organizations should prioritize cultural sensitivity when implementing such leadership models. However, the reliance on relational transparency—a core element of authentic leadership—may be constrained in hierarchical, high-power-distance cultures, where employees are often hesitant to share open feedback.

Similarly, integrating servant leadership and workplace spirituality across diverse settings presents its own set of obstacles. Cultural and organizational barriers often limit the effectiveness of spiritual initiatives, particularly in industries or regions where spirituality may be seen as misaligned with professional norms (Matteson & Irving, 2005). McClellan (2009) proposed that overcoming these barriers requires a holistic approach that adapts to multiple organizational levels, fostering a culture of inclusivity and respect for individual spiritual values. Given the limited research in this field, future studies should explore the multilevel impact of workplace spirituality across various industries and cultural contexts. Specifically, investigating how servant leadership can be adapted for high-power-distance organizations

could offer valuable insights into fostering servant-led spiritual cultures more effectively (Pirkola et al., 2016).

4. Conclusion

Servant leadership and workplace spirituality offer a transformative pathway for organizations striving to foster ethical and highly engaged work environments. This study identified that servant leadership significantly enhances job satisfaction and organizational trust through its emphasis on empathy and community building (Reddy, 2018). In particular, organizations that adopt servant leadership frameworks reported a 25% increase in employee retention and a 30% reduction in ethical violations (Otake-Ebede et al., 2019). Authentic leadership was found to empower employees, with one study showing that Canadian nurses led by authentic leaders experienced a 40% improvement in job satisfaction and a 50% reduction in stress levels (Wong & Laschinger, 2013). By promoting an ethical climate where employees feel valued, connected, and inspired, servant leaders enhance well-being and performance at both individual and organizational levels. Expanding research on these leadership approaches across industries and cultures can deepen our understanding of how spirituality and servant leadership can cultivate sustainable and ethical workplaces.

Similarly, the integration of authentic leadership and workplace spirituality presents a promising model for advancing employee engagement, ethical conduct, and job satisfaction. Authentic leaders, by fostering a culture of transparency, integrity, and purpose, create work environments that not only achieve but often exceed organizational goals. Future research should investigate the adaptation of spiritual leadership frameworks in hierarchical, high-power-distance cultures, where transparency and relational ethics face systemic challenges. For instance, the integration of workplace spirituality into these contexts could be evaluated through longitudinal case studies focusing on its impact on cross-cultural teams.

Together, servant, authentic, and spiritual leadership form a comprehensive framework that promotes ethical behavior, well-being, and a profound sense of purpose within organizations. By prioritizing values such as empathy, transparency, and integrity, these leadership models establish environments where employees are motivated to exceed expectations, thus benefiting organizational success and contributing to societal well-being. Investigating the cultural adaptability of these models across varied settings could offer valuable insights into their effectiveness in an increasingly globalized workplace.

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