



REGENT
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ROUNDTABLES

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2024

Welcome to the Proceedings of the 2024 Regent Research Roundtables. In addition to presentations of empirical studies, the Roundtable format allows presenters to discuss new concepts, possible future research topics, consulting methods, new teaching methods, and panel discussions of topics that are of interest to our academic communities. The topics are wide-ranging in content and delivery, and we trust you find nuggets of truth, things to think on, and lessons for your own research, leadership, followership, and organization.



2024 Abstracts

AI and Machine Learning

AI Facilitates or Impedes Human Flourishing

Dr. Maria Lai-Ling Lam

LCC International University, Lithuania

Roundtable: AI and Machine Learning

Abstract

This paper builds on an extensive literature review of AI governance norms, reflecting on the power structure and injustices reinforced by AI, and decades of personal experience in healthcare and education. This paper applies Kanter and Bynum's (2022) flourishing ethics to highlight basic ethical principles for human flourishing in the context of AI. As a rapidly accelerating political, economic, cultural, and scientific force, AI is likely to exacerbate global inequality and poverty, impeding human flourishing due to the significant power imbalance between AI companies and emerging economies in less affluent countries. The paper raises critical questions to prevent amplifying these injustices and to reactivate core human values often overlooked by statistical optimization. It recommends implementing inclusive growth dialogues, developing "safe-AI" rather than "AI-safe" cultures, and steering AI-innovation toward labor-using rather than labor-saving for greater justice. Advanced economies should prioritize AI innovation and integration, providing a robust regulatory framework and capital tax to ensure these few AI companies compensate those whose lives are disrupted. Emerging markets and low-income countries should invest in digital infrastructure and a digitally competent workforce, adapting AI labor-using, rather than labor-saving purposes. The co-development process between society and technology should involve wider stakeholder participation to enhance human flourishing in an AI-driven world.

Keywords: flourishing ethics, labor-using AI, safe-AI, inclusive dialogues, global inequality

Keywords:

Using AI in Recruiting: Ethical and Practical Considerations

Jennifer A. Cole

*Independent Human Resources Consultant and Indiana Wesleyan University
Roundtable: AI & Machine Learning Roundtable*

Abstract

The allure of using artificial intelligence (AI) to streamline the recruiting process for organizations has become increasingly compelling. Identifying ways to make recruiting more efficient and effective provides an organization with a competitive advantage (Hunkenschroer & Luetge, 2022). The capacity for AI to review massive amounts of information in a short timeframe helps close the gap between recruiters and top-quality candidates (Gray, 2024). However, as an imperfect science, the AI algorithms that undergird recruiting tools may lead to discrimination and bias with unintended yet impactful consequences (Bansal et al., 2023). Biases already existing in the data that fuels AI may skew outcomes from recruiting tools, and AI may introduce new types of biases not yet studied (Ntoutsis et al., 2020). The following conceptual study seeks to examine where in the recruitment process AI adds value, where AI adds risk, and where AI should not replace human effort and interaction.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, AI, recruiting, unconscious bias, intuition, human intelligence.

Biblical Perspectives

Bridge-Building Leadership and Human Flourishing in Galatians: Traversing Ethnic, Socioeconomic, and Gender Barriers

Paul J. Palma, Ph.D.

Regent University

Roundtable: Biblical Perspectives

Abstract

Most contemporary delineations of human flourishing lack the theistic assertion grounding humanity's thriving in the Creator's design. A holistic biblical definition of flourishing accounts for humanity's psychological, physical, existential, moral, and social health as God's image-bearers and stewards of his dominion on earth. The book of Galatians presents one of the New Testament's most compelling explanations of human flourishing. This paper examines the Apostle Paul's subclaims in Galatians 3:28 on ethnic (Jew/Greek), socioeconomic (enslaved/free), and gender (male/female) division in view of the theme of bridge-building leadership. My argument begins with a

survey of the historical and literary background of the verse, proceeds to its implications for leadership theory, and then discusses the present-day applications of the bridge-building paradigm.

Followership

The Role of Individuation in Courageous Followership as Modeled by the Daughters of Zelophehad

Jane R. Caulton, Ph.D.

Independent Scholar

Roundtable: Followership

Abstract

In the annals of Hebrew history is an often-overlooked story of five women who stepped out of their cultural paradigm to request a correction to the Israelite law that not only benefitted them but their nation for generations. The story of the daughters of the Zelophehad in the book of Numbers, Chapter 27, depicts an example of the role followers play in increasing opportunities for humanity to flourish. Such followers, according to Chaleff (2009), may be considered courageous in that they move outside of the norm to challenge leaders to bring about change. In this paper, I use the du Tout et al. (2011) model of individuation in a psycho-hermeneutic exploration of how the psychological phenomenon empowers followers to be agents of change and contribute to human flourishing, which I define as environmental well-being for this paper.

Keywords: followers, followership, daughters of Zelophehad, individuation, psycho-hermeneutics, courageous followers

Following the Leader? A New Academic Model of Ethical Decision-Making for Christian Followers

Vanya Starr

Regent University

Roundtable: Followership

Abstract

What makes an ethical Christian follower? More importantly, how do Christian followers make better ethical decisions? By delving into followership and Christian ethical theories, a new academic model emerges that should aid in understanding the determinants of ethical Christian followership and the motivators and worldview that produce better ethical decision-making. Utilizing worldview and the expectancy theory

of motivation, it is possible to ascertain a typology of ethical Christian followership that corresponds to Kelley's concept but also enhances knowledge around follower decision-making. This model acts as a future guide to teaching and communications surrounding ethical decision-making in the Church by delineating what effective, ethical Christian followership looks like. With increased clarity around what ethical decision-making for Christian followers looks like, it is possible to create intentional training and development programs to promote this functionality in the workplace and other institutions.

Human Resource Development

Benefits of Human Resource Professionals in Churches: Ethics for Effective HR Development Programs

George K. Nti

Regent University

Roundtable: Human Resource Development

Abstract

Human resource development demands professional skills and knowledge – a cornerstone of every church's growth. This article presents three practical approaches from Zech (2010) for implementing a human resource development program in a church. It offers three actionable recommendations for implementing human resource development in churches: using appropriate methods, employing suitable evaluators, and managing role conflicts. The final section suggests five biblical principles of human resources development ethics, providing a practical guide for church leaders: honesty, respecting others, knowing your yes and no, investing wisely in others, and fairness. This article is valuable for organizations and churches seeking to implement effective human resource strategies. It equips leaders with the knowledge and tools to make strategic decisions for their organization's leadership development programs, empowering them to foster growth and productivity within their church community.

Keywords: church leadership, lay leadership development, church growth, Christian leadership ethics, ecclesia resource management.

Balance Between Engaged and Disengaged: Being in This World but Not of It

Alina Wreczycki

Chad Newton

Belhaven University
Roundtable: Human Resource Development

Abstract

In the spirit of human flourishing, six participants' perceptions of social identity and the role of spirituality and self-transformation within the context of the U.S. culture were examined using Tajfel's (1978) social identity theory. Following Dean and Newton's (2022) resetting and returning to the drawing board method, social identity theory's application in the U.S. culture as a composite of 50 states over the past four decades was examined in relation to reliance on (a) belonging, (b) self-esteem, and (c) pride in establishing and sustaining social identity. The national culture analysis referencing key events from the 1980s, 1990s, and the first and second decades of the new millennium was examined. Since the U.S. culture functions within the global dynamic impacted by technology, the answers to four research questions were expected to provide data to inform whether technology supports sustaining moral traits or is a hindrance. Wreczycki's (2019) working definition of national culture as a repository of values binding citizens as a nation and rights and obligations was referenced to analyze traits and behaviors. Wreczycki's (2021) sustainable social value model was used to examine selfhood sustainability. Jesus' values derived from Matthew 5:3-12 extracted by Winston (2002) and Wreczycki were referenced as a benchmark to assess how participants' traits derived from content and themes compared. Robbins' (1996) sociorhetorical interpretation was used to move toward what it means to balance being engaged and disengaged – to be in this world but not of it. The John 14:27 pericope was analyzed exegetically to explain the concept of self-awareness and self-transformation using Lancaster and Palframan's (2009) position that spirituality plays a noteworthy role in personal growth based on (a) openness to transcendent power, (b) self-acceptance, and (c) elevation above ego's constructs.

Keywords: self-awareness, self-transformation, social identity, spirituality

Kingdom Business

The Effect of Organizational Culture on Employee Flourishing in the Workplace

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Roundtable: *Kingdom Business*

Abstract

Culture is a concept that has existed for centuries and serves as the driving force behind every organization. It is what identifies a group of people or an organization, and it cannot exist in isolation. Culture determines how an organization can flourish and thrive within its ecosystem. Culture is dynamic and can be transmitted to others (Northouse, 2013). A kingdom culture is centered on the teachings and examples of Christ. It is built on ethical values, integrity, transparency, honesty, empathy, trust, and servant leadership. Kingdom culture promotes an environment where employees are encouraged to uphold the organization's moral values when performing their duties. It focuses on glorifying God in every aspect of its operations while promoting employee well-being. An organization's leaders are an integral part of its culture. Leaders initiate the process of culture creation within their organization. Leaders who understand organizational culture can interpret employee behaviors and cultivate a thriving environment, leading to long-term success. This paper discusses the importance of culture in an organization and its effect on performance and long-term effectiveness. It highlights the impact of an organization's leadership in creating culture, as well as the power of culture in shaping the trajectory of an organization. Furthermore, the text explores the influence of an organization's culture on its employees and how leaders can employ principles of kingdom business culture, such as ethical values, integrity, transparency, honesty, empathy, trust, and servant leadership to positively impact the organization and contribute to the well-being of its employees.

Keywords: organization, culture, employee flourishing, leadership

Transforming Organizational Culture – A Case Study on Driving Innovation Through Strategic Culture Change

Yemisi Songo-Williams

Indiana Wesleyan University

Roundtable: Kingdom Business

Abstract

Change is a necessary process for the growth of modern organizations. However, many change initiatives fail because they neglect to change the organization's culture. Cameron and Quinn (2011) maintained that culture shapes many aspects of an organization, including performance, competitiveness, employee behavior, hiring and retention practices, communication, and decision making. This case study used Cameron and Quinn's Competing Values Framework and the associated Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument to determine the current and desired culture of the Programming Innovation Department (PID) within an international nongovernmental organization (INGO). The paper explores how the PID's current culture, leadership

practices, systems, and processes align with the principles and values of God’s kingdom. The author discusses possible barriers that may hinder the department from achieving the desired culture and provides recommendations to INGO leaders for driving strategic cultural change within their organizations to improve innovation and sustainability within the competitive INGO funding landscape.

Keywords: organizational culture, culture assessment, adhocratic culture, innovation, change management, international nongovernmental organization

Strengthening Africa’s Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Through Kingdom Business Approaches: Building a Collaborative Ecosystem Model That Works

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Roundtable: Kingdom Business

Abstract

Africa’s youthful population presents both opportunities and challenges for the continent’s economic development. With a median age of 19 and 10-12 million youth entering the workforce annually, the gap between available jobs and new entrants is substantial, with only 3.1 million formal positions accessible each year (African Development Bank, 2020). Compounding this issue, approximately 72 million African youth are categorized as NEET (not in employment, education, or training), creating significant obstacles to economic stability and growth (International Labour Organization, 2020). Addressing these challenges requires innovative approaches that integrate ethical and values-driven frameworks into entrepreneurial ecosystems in African contexts, especially to inspire and mentor the development of ethical business practices incorporating Kingdom Business values. The researchers explored how Kingdom Business approaches – rooted in ethical values, stewardship, and holistic development – can enhance Africa’s entrepreneurship ecosystem based on a Global Skills Factory collaborative ecosystem model embedding Kingdom Business principles at every stage to foster a more supportive environment for ethical business practices among young entrepreneurs. Our methodology involves a thorough analysis of existing

ecosystem components, including entrepreneur training, coaching, and mentorship in addition to access to finance and market linkages, while integrating Kingdom Business values training to address these issues (with focused case studies of Regent Center for Entrepreneurship's Business Development Center and Global Skills Factory Oy).

Keywords: Africa's entrepreneurship ecosystem, collaborative entrepreneurship ecosystem model, ecosystem support organizations (ESO), entrepreneurial support frameworks, Kingdom Business approaches

Organizational Leadership

Flourishing Teams for Human Flourishing

Susan Barton

You Who Group and Indiana Wesleyan University

Leigh Cameron

You Who Group

Roundtable: Organizational Leadership Roundtable

Abstract

With the volume of time spent in workplace collaboration, can healthy work teams serve as a primary driver of personal well-being and human flourishing? When work teams are healthy, human flourishing is more likely. Much of the New Testament offers a Christian theology and a practical framework for human flourishing. Paul and other authors, inspired by God, knew of the essential role group dynamics played for individual human flourishing. We suggest flourishing teams – successful in fulfilling their purpose in a healthy and vigorous way – consist of five primary ingredients: strong identity, rallying purpose, good people, thoughtful cadence, and effective communication. With these five essential ingredients, teams better understand who they are, why they exist, who should be on them, and how they function – together and as individuals. Experience has shown that by applying these principles, teams are more likely to achieve effective and efficient outcomes while developing healthy interpersonal relationships. As well-being increases, humans flourish.

Keywords: teams, team development, team identity, purpose, people, cadence, communication

The Organizational Leadership Dynamics of Human Flourishing

Jamie Wright

New Mexico Military Institute

Roundtable: Organizational Leadership

Abstract

The structure of organizational leadership plays an imperative role in employees' lives, as well as in their mental health and stability within the workplace. This paper explores the following areas: the benefits of employee well-being, the culture of organizational leadership that supports human flourishing, positive reinforcement, self-belonging/inclusion, leadership and organizational identity, organizational commitment, professional development, growth, and job/career satisfaction. Each topic about organizational leadership and structure from a biblical perspective is thoroughly explained. Practical applications for improvement and how to reach your employees and help them be included in the growth process are provided.

Keywords: organizational leadership, professional development, human flourishing, biblical perspective, self-belonging

Professional Consulting

Partnerships of Honor: Chairs' Reflection and Advance

Dr. Diane M. Wiater, Ph.D.

Regent University

Dr. Kelly M. G. Whelan, DSL

Belem Leaders

Roundtable: Professional Coaching

Abstract

This article is a strategic future-focused review by the Professional Coaching Roundtable (PCR) chairs and presents highlights of two panel discussions, presenter-recorded presentations, and collaborative conversations. The theme for the PCR was *Partnerships of Honor*. Eight presenters in the PCR are from varied professions, supporting the trend of the expanding contexts of coaching. Three coaching models were presented through the PCR: the "One Word leadership" model, the "cognitive coaching" model, and the effective "effective leaders is" model™. Two case studies were presented, three presentations addressed health or the medical field, one presentation homed in on a coaching skill, and one presentation invited attendees into a new frontier

of coaching – the metaverse. Practitioners noted the high value of creating trust, focusing on where the client wants to focus, building confidence, listening, asking questions, and accountability as essential in coaching partnerships that lead to flourishing.

Keywords: coaching, partnership, honor, flourishing, purpose

The Effective Leader is Impactful, Fair, Strategic, Balanced, and Equipped to Flourish

Dr. Lakeisha Walker, LCMHC, CTRP

Bridge of Hope Life Transformational Services, LLC

Professional Coaching: Partnerships of Honor

Roundtable: Professional Coaching

Abstract

Flourishing does not occur by chance; it occurs by effort. And growth transpires when the effort is purposeful and intentional. We face various challenges daily, and our perception of the challenges determines our actions. The mindset to flourish is often developed when one has been exposed to a view of thriving versus a view of stagnation. Thinking in a stagnated way overexerts the brain. One who struggles with human flourishing could also struggle with professional flourishing, thus hindering effective business decisions and leadership efforts. The leader's mindset is the driving force of leadership activities. Leaders increase self-awareness, harness abilities, increase performance, shift mindsets, and are equipped to effectively lead with the interjection of coaching. When utilized in the coaching aspect, *the effective leader is* leadership development model assesses leadership capacity based on one's ability to be impactful, fair, strategic, and balanced. Leaders are assisted with identifying and developing skills that equip them to identify and develop skills in others. That is the power of coaching, human flourishing, its role in business and leadership, and the implementation of The Effective Leader is Leadership Development Model™.

Keywords: leadership, coaching, human flourishing, mindset shifts

Human Flourishing Through Succession Planning: An Owner, Successor, and Organizational Journey of Growth Through Coaching Initiatives

Brandi Humphries

Regent University

Roundtables: Professional Coaching

Abstract

Most small businesses in America fail, because when a person achieves a certain level of skill and proficiency in a trade or concept, they believe that talent and proficiency will transfer into a successful business. While this business owner proved to be an exception, he made up for his lack of business acumen and competencies by building trusting relationships with his clients. He was known for his resilience, quality workmanship, and ability to take on the most challenging projects others said could not be done. Enter the hurdles, hardships, and blessings of succession planning. In the case of this business enterprise, the motivators, leadership style and communication methods of the owner and successor do not align, creating a mismatch in the transition of power. Additionally, the owner lacks communication skills, the discipline to hold others accountable, and the knowledge to act as a mentor to the successor. This value misalignment between the owner and the successor and lack of an intentional succession plan has created a sticking point, bringing the organization's forward progression to a halt. This organizational case study serves as a guide to facilitate a triumphant succession transition that develops and nurtures life-long partnerships while establishing best practices in communication and leadership that honor not only the subcontractor industry and concrete profession, but also the employees, their families, and their communities, leaving behind a legacy for generations to come. It is through coaching that true human flourishing will carry the organization through the succession process.

Keywords: human flourishing, executive coaching, succession planning, competency gap

Honoring Goals and Dreams: A Holistic Approach to Academic Success, Coaching, and Advising

Dr. Shoneen N. Brown

Regent University

Roundtable: Professional Coaching

Abstract

In the current context of higher education, a holistic approach to support and development can also go beyond the conventional academic framework. This paper highlights the need for a strong partnership between success coaching and advising by calling for a more holistic approach that encompasses students' academic, psychological, social, and physical aspects. It is possible to do this while looking beyond the classroom, as it will help institutions create a culture that changes students' mindsets, beliefs, and personal concepts of success. Applying a holistic approach enables institutions to acknowledge each student's unique goals and dreams and the

role of institutional collaboration in their achievement. Through observed case studies, this integrated approach reviews how it can change the students' perception, which should encourage the stakeholders to shift to a structured, student-focused approach for the benefit of each student – serving as a call to action for stakeholders to adopt an intentional, student-centered model that allows every student to reach their fullest potential and flourish.

Keywords: academic coaching, student retention, higher education, academic flourishing, partnership, case management, student support, transformational advising

Creating Space for Human Flourishing: Partnering with the Metaverse in Coaching

Dr. Kelly M. G. Whelan

Belem Leaders

Roundtable: Professional Coaching

Abstract

Professional coaching involves developing various skills that, when consistently strengthened over time, enhance effectiveness and impact the coach-client partnership. In an era where artificial intelligence and the metaverse are developing at record speeds, integrating technologies into coaching practices is complex, bringing unique challenges for practitioners working to maintain integrity. As the coaching profession explores tech-driven environments, Christian and secular coaches seek to understand opportunities, limitations, and ethical considerations. With new ways of operating using digital platforms, metaverse practitioners must elevate their learning and development and coaching presence to design a psychologically safe client experience. Colossians 3:23 (*New International Version Bible*, 1978/1990), provides guidance in “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters.” This presentation paper will examine how practitioners can partner with man-made technologies to create human flourishing through coaching opportunities delivered with excellence.

Keywords: Christian coaching, metaverse, artificial intelligence, integrity, transformation, psychological safety, technology, presence, flourishing

Feedback: Fueling Leadership Development for Human Flourishing and Honor

Diane M. Wiater, Ph.D.

Regent University

Roundtable: Professional Coaching

Abstract

Professional coaching is well suited to address, display, and yield human flourishing. Since introducing the Golden Trifecta of Leadership Development in 2022 (Wiater, 2022), advancing the understanding and application of the model has been paramount. Feedback is essential for leader growth in all three relationships of the model. Feedback done right and well can not only lead to flourishing but is a demonstration of partnerships of honor. Applying feedback is what gives it power. Trust and psychological safety are core to creating relationships of honor. High-impact leaders tend to receive less and lower-quality feedback. When the leader is honored, they can flourish, and when the leader flourishes, there is a pathway for followers and the organization to flourish as well.

Keywords: feedback, leader, flourish, honor, partnership, Christian, coach

Strategic Foresight

Systemic Futures: Leveraging Strategic Foresight for Holistic Human Flourishing in Christian Leadership

Rodney B. Woods

Regent University

Roundtable: Strategic Foresight

Abstract

This article investigates the application of strategic foresight methodologies by Christian leaders to promote comprehensive human flourishing across personal, communal, and societal dimensions. By integrating a systems approach with foresight tools such as environmental scanning, scenario planning, and backcasting, leaders can better anticipate changes, reframe perspectives, and uncover innovations necessary for realizing a biblical vision of flourishing. The study includes case studies that demonstrate Christian organizations' successful use of strategic foresight. The findings emphasize the critical role of foresight in equipping today's "chiefs of Issachar" to discern future trajectories and develop strategies aligned with divine purposes.

Keywords: strategic foresight, human flourishing, Christian leadership, scenario planning, backcasting, environmental scanning, futures thinking

Servant Leadership

Trauma-Informed Leadership: Integrating Research-Based Leadership Theories and SAMHSA Principles for Building Resilient Teams

Dr. Rebekah C. Lloyd

Lloyd Consulting Firm

Roundtable: Servant Leadership

Abstract

Trauma-informed leadership is an emerging framework that integrates an understanding of trauma and its impacts with leadership practices that foster resilience, empowerment, and emotional healing. Trauma-informed leaders prioritize the needs of their followers by practicing behaviors and embodying attributes that promote well-being and resilience. This article examines trauma-informed leadership through the lens of established leadership theories, including transformational, servant, adaptive, and authentic leadership. It highlights its alignment with the trauma-informed care principles developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. The four core attributes of trauma-informed leadership – authenticity, emotional intelligence, relational capacity, and resilience – are discussed in detail, providing leaders with a framework for creating supportive and healing environments. Additionally, the four behaviors of trauma-informed leaders – understanding trauma, regulating distress, empowering others, and providing emotional healing – offer practical strategies for navigating the complexities of trauma in the workplace. Together, these insights provide a comprehensive guide for leaders seeking to implement trauma-informed principles in their organizations.

Keywords: trauma, trauma-informed leadership, leadership model, resilience, trauma-informed care principles, leadership development

A Mentor's Journey ... I Get It!

Rocky Wallace

Campbellsville University

Roundtable: Servant Leadership

Abstract

This personal essay walks the reader through the career path of an educator, illustrating personal and professional growth all along the way – including the transformational impact of earning a DSL degree from Regent University in 2007. Key takeaways: gold nuggets, lessons learned, questions for further reflection, references to Robert Greenleaf

and other major influencers in the servant leadership arena, as well as recommendations for further reading give the reader an opportunity to utilize this life journey reflection as a personal tool for self-assessment and growth.

Keywords: servant leadership, relationship, emotional intelligence, passion, calling, community, shepherd, innovation, second half, servant, listening, accountable

Human Flourishing: The Acts of Selfless Love

Jamie Wright

New Mexico Military Institute

Roundtable: Servant Leadership

Abstract

Servant leadership is letting go of *self* and focusing on the needs of others. Evaluating the benefits of human flourishing and reaching beyond ourselves allows us to serve others better, find purpose in our calling, and serve those who need it most. This paper tells the story of serving those evacuees from the Ruidoso Fire on June 17, 2024. It also examines the song and movie "I Can Only Imagine" about a man's hate towards his father and then, as his father grew closer to Jesus, his father became his best friend before passing. This paper discusses different types of human flourishing while involving intercultural communication and servant leadership. The focused areas are self-pleasing and self-gratification, a resting place, bringing hope through serving, a safe place, achieving goals and teachable moments, and the importance of effective communication.

Keywords: Mathew 5-6, intercultural communication, human flourishing, fire evacuees

Leadership and Innovation: A Framework for Organizational Change Through Servant Leadership Constructs

Landon Meriweather

Regent University

Roundtables: Transformative Innovation

Abstract

This article presents a novel approach to understanding the role of leadership in fostering organizational innovation by focusing on the intrinsic qualities that define an innovative leader. Unlike traditional leadership models that emphasize the actions leaders must take to drive innovation, this study highlights the dispositional attributes that inherently predispose leaders to be innovative. Through a comprehensive literature

review, the article examines various leadership styles, including transformational, transactional, ethical, ambidextrous, and entrepreneurial leadership, highlighting their reliance on the leader's influence over followers to achieve innovative outcomes. Among these, servant leadership is identified as uniquely effective due to its follower-centric approach, which prioritizes the development, well-being, and empowerment of followers above organizational goals. A servant leadership construct is proposed, and a mapping exercise is conducted tracing the constructs to empirical evidence that supports their role in producing positive innovation results. The study concludes by proposing a framework that maps servant leadership constructs to specific innovative behaviors and outcomes, offering a structured approach to understanding the direct influence of servant leadership traits on innovation. This research contributes to the leadership and innovation discourse by advocating for a shift from action-based leadership strategies to a focus on the essential characteristics that define truly innovative leaders.



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AI Facilitates or Impedes Human Flourishing

Dr. Maria Lai-Ling Lam

LCC International University, Lithuania

Roundtable: AI and Machine Learning

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This paper builds on an extensive literature review of AI governance norms, reflecting on the power structure and injustices reinforced by AI, and decades of personal experience in healthcare and education. This paper applies Kanter and Bynum's (2022) flourishing ethics to highlight basic ethical principles for human flourishing in the context of AI. As a rapidly accelerating political, economic, cultural, and scientific force, AI is likely to exacerbate global inequality and poverty, impeding human flourishing due to the significant power imbalance between AI companies and emerging economies in less affluent countries. The paper raises critical questions to prevent amplifying these injustices and to reactivate core human values often overlooked by statistical optimization. It recommends implementing inclusive growth dialogues, developing "safe-AI" rather than "AI-safe" cultures, and steering AI-innovation toward labor-using rather than labor-saving for greater justice. Advanced economies should prioritize AI innovation and integration, providing a robust regulatory framework and capital tax to ensure these few AI companies compensate those whose lives are disrupted. Emerging markets and low-income countries should invest in digital infrastructure and a digitally competent workforce, adapting AI labor-using, rather than labor-saving purposes. The co-development process between society and technology should involve wider stakeholder participation to enhance human flourishing in an AI-driven world.

Keywords: flourishing ethics, labor-using AI, safe-AI, inclusive dialogues, global inequality

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) encompasses technologies that enable machines to sense, interpret, act, and learn to imitate human cognitive abilities (Manning, 2020). With the advent of Generative AI (GenAI), which uses sophisticated large language models to

rapidly generate new text and images from existing data, the technology has been widely adopted in our daily lives, bringing promises and risks (Cazzaniga et al., 2024; Gratton, 2024; IBM, 2023; Maslej et al., 2024). AI is supposed to serve our central ethical value: human flourishing (Kantar & Bynum, 2022). However, powerful nations, corporations, businesses, organizations, and individuals are seeking AI devices to help them achieve their narrow goals and disseminate their own interests and fostering a narrow sense of human flourishing in the process (VanderWeele, 2017). Without good AI governance and regulation, AI will exacerbate income and wealth inequality, education and health disparities, and increase social and political turmoil (Arnold, 2024; Cazzaniga et al. 2023; European Union, 2024; UNESCO, 2023; WHO, 2023). As AI evolves faster than the regulations, there is a pressing need for thoughtful and ongoing dialogues on how to guide its development, mitigate risks, and promote justice for human flourishing. Jack Clark and Ray Perrault, the co-directors of the Stanford Institute for Human-centered Artificial Intelligence, echo these opinions in their recent Artificial Intelligence Index Report (Maslej et al., 2023):

AI will continue to improve and, as such, become a greater part of all our lives. Given the increased presence of this technology and its potential for massive disruption, we should all begin thinking more critically about how exactly we want AI to be developed and deployed. We should also ask questions about who is deploying it – as our analysis shows, AI is increasingly defined by the actions of a small set of private sector actors, rather than a broader range of societal actors.

This article is structured into four sections. The first section describes Kanter & Bynum's (2022) flourishing ethics and how AI can facilitate human flourishing. The second section describes how AI impedes human flourishing. The third section raises critical questions to prevent amplifying these injustices and to reactivate core human values often overlooked by statistical optimization. The fourth section recommends practices for the development and deployment of AI to enable human flourishing. The fifth section is the conclusion and points for future research areas.

Kanter and Bynum's Flourishing Ethics and AI facilitates Human Flourishing

Organizations and individuals are increasingly seeking AI devices to assist them as they try to quickly achieve their goals more efficiently at a lower cost, but this comes with growing risks as AI systems become more reliant on making decisions for us. Kantar & Bynum (2022) propose using the Flourishing Ethics approach to determine which ethical principles and values should be instilled in AI decision-making agents. They describe Flourishing Ethics as a set of related ethical theories that prioritize human flourishing as the central ethical value and with support by other ethical values (Kantar

& Bynum, 2022). They argue that humans share a common nature and require the following ethical values and principles for human flourishing: autonomy; supportive community; community with security, knowledge, opportunities and resources; justice; self-respect, and mutual respect. Kantar & Bynum (2022) wrote:

Autonomy – the ability to make significant choices and carry them out – is a necessary condition for human flourishing. To flourish, people need to be part of a supportive community. The community should provide – as effectively as it can – security, knowledge, opportunities, and resources. To maximize flourishing within a community, justice must prevail. Respect – including mutual respect between persons – plays a significant role in creating and maintaining human flourishing....Self-respect also is important for human flourishing in order to preserve human dignity and minimize the harmful effects of shame, self-disappointment, and feelings of worthlessness (p. 603).

AI can automate and augment human capabilities to scale up effective and low-cost solutions quickly. This can facilitate human flourishing. For example, Singapore Eye Lesions Analyzer (SELENA) successfully implemented devices to automate the detection of referable diabetic retinopathy (DR) in Singaporean public hospitals with support from politicians, physicians, and patients. Politicians benefit from reduced healthcare costs and enhanced international reputations, physicians see reduced screening workloads, and patients receive results within one hour instead of weeks (Miller et al., 2024). SELENA's success in Singapore led to its adoption in African countries for DR grading. The DR devices support patients' autonomy by providing information in a way that helps patients make informed decisions and take early intervention about their health. Patients are supported by community with respect, security, and an abundance of resources. The DR also enables patients in African countries to be informed to take early intervention.

Another example is Med-PaLM 2 (2024), a large language model designed for the medical domain that can pass the medical exam, be a generalist, provide second opinions to patients, and deal with multiple imaging and disease. ChaptGPT4 generates original materials that are similar to the trained data, demonstrates symbolic reasoning, and shows a capacity for logic. Speech recognition devices can also help scientists to group similar chemicals together. Large data set from cities, such as the flow of automotive traffic and the footprint of passengers can be used to improve urban planning and city management (Williams, 2023).

Thus, AI may enable many people to access higher-quality education, health care, professional research, creative arts, and employment opportunities...etc (Askin et al., 2023; Bajwa et al., 2021; Cukurova et al., 2023; Cukurova, 2024). New positions related to AI development skills, data science, computational modeling, ethics and more are being

generated to simulate and optimize current industry systems for greater competitive advantages. Research shows that high-skilled professionals who are exposed to AI will be shielded from being replaced because social norms and values prefer the existence of skilled professionals who are kept in the loop of the AI-augmented decision-making process (Cazzaniga et al., 2024). For example, the productivity and income of judges and doctors are expected to increase when they demonstrate the ability to integrate AI into their workflows for the benefit of their clients.

AI Impedes Human Flourishing

AI also has great potential for massive disruptions such as increased unemployment, out-of-control automation processes, and more. AI systems will exceed human capabilities as noted by Turing (1951): “Once the machine thinking method had started, it would not take long to outstrip our feeble powers.” AI will affect our work, relationships, democratic systems, and national security. AI will exacerbate inequality and poverty around the globe (Aghion et al., 2021; Cazzaniga et al., 2024; Korinek et al., 2021). The gain of capital is much higher than the gain of labor wages given by AI as an intensive capital investment (Acemoglu, 2023; Acemoglu & Johnson, 2023, 2024; Acemoglu & Restrepo, 2022). Most of the benefits of growth will favor those at the top, resulting in wider income inequality in most countries. Many AI labor-saving devices serving the world, developed from a few AI “superstar companies,” will result in lower actual GDP of emerging and low-income countries (Korinek et al., 2021). AI is predicted to have an unequal negative disruptive effect on people in different geographical and industry areas (Cazzaniga et al., 2024; Crawford, 2021; Goldman Sachs, 2024a, 2024b; McKinsey & Co., 2023). Powerful companies can easily shift their liabilities to humans involved in AI-augmented decision-making process (Tschider, 2024). Core human values such as mercy, dignity, and genuine human connections can easily be denied by AI based on probability statistics and the programming effort to optimize for particular groups’ human preferences (Russell, 2022; Tasioulas, 2022).

AI can augment high-skilled professionals to have higher productivity but can also displace many people through automation. AI will likely worsen overall inequality and impede human flourishing for those most in need. IMF research finds that AI will endanger 33% of jobs in advanced economics, 24% in emerging economics, and 18 % in low-income countries (Alonso et al., 2020). AI will make a profound impact on the labor market quicker in advanced economics than in emerging economics and low-income countries because these developed countries’ employment structures focus more on cognitive tasks (Cazzaniga et al., 2024). Some cities in developed countries that do not attract the investment of AI may face tremendous economic and political turmoil while more than 30% of their workers would face the risk of substitution by autonomous devices in a short period of time (Goldman Sachs, 2024a, 2024b; McKinsey & Co., 2023). The benefits of AI cannot be shared equitably given the current development and

deployment of AI in developed countries (Crawford, 2021). Although the developing and emerging economies seem to have less exposure to the negative impact of AI, their low-skilled labor can be easily substituted by labor-saving AI devices.

There is a significant power imbalance between the select few AI companies that control the world market and emerging economies and low-income countries. A few AI companies located in a few powerful countries but serve the entire world economy. These “superstar” companies disproportionately located in high-income countries, do not bear the cost of employee displacement and welfare outside their own borders. They refine their AI models using data collected from emerging economies and low-income countries without compensation and provide advertisements or information to these regions at almost zero marginal cost. These few companies monopolize the international market and create high entry barriers for other firms, especially those in emerging economies and low-income groups. AI devices from these powerful companies will be easily and cheaply rolled out to developing countries and replace many unskilled workers in developing countries. These AI labor-saving devices will reduce investment in developing countries and their actual GDP (Alonso et al., 2020). Inequalities and poverty created by AI within developing countries will be greater than those in developed countries because developing countries often lack the institutional capacities to counteract harmful AI side effects or fully harness the benefits of AI (Cazzaniga et al., 2024). These few “superstar companies” enjoy winner-takes-all benefits, undermine the bargaining power of traditional labor, and do not pay any price for increasing social and political turmoil in countries with many unskilled workers and low AI readiness (Korinek et al., 2021).

When a small group of private technology companies control the AI foundation models, it can reinforce existing power structures and worsen labor conditions (Crawford, 2021; Lewchuk, 2017). Foundation models are trained on broad datasets that contain not only statistical/computational biases but also human and system biases. They may perpetuate human and system biases (Bommasani et al., 2023; Maslej et al., 2023; Sendak et al., 2020). Often, the data for training focuses on statistical/computational biases while ignoring historical human and systemic biases. For example, foundation models are frequently trained on data obtained from white people in developed countries, so that data is naturally embedded in their values. The complex layers of these algorithms are not explainable and transparent to users (Jin et al., 2024). For example, the defects of the foundation model are inherited by application models in the healthcare system, leaving users unable to understand how the AI system functions or fails. The foundation model can exacerbate social inequalities and fail to adapt to the multimodality of scanning equipment, new experimental technologies, or settings. Suppliers rarely report data quality assessments when presenting their model performance (Sendak et al., 2020). The Center for Research on Foundation Models must continuously urge developers to disclose data quality such that they can report

transparency index scores (Bommasani et al., 2024). There is no standardized data quality framework for similar AI-medical products (Rajesh et al., 2023; Sendak et al., 2020).

Many AI products in advanced economics need strategic alignment between organizational-administrative processes, AI technologies, and slack resources to do experimentation (Alami et al., 2024, Bommasani et al., 2023; Greenhalgh et al., 2017; Maslej et al., 2023, 2024). For example, hospital acquisition processes focus solely on the lowest price in the tender process, in the long run, they may end up paying more to update their software or risk using outdated software. It is also an inevitability for new technologies to lack compatibility with existing AI devices. Many AI products are not comparable and are operated across different hospitals or health care systems (Sendak et al., 2020). Generally, many AI devices present and utilized in healthcare originate from countries with extensive expertise and resources. When AI devices are presented as augmenting rather than replacing doctors, they gain more trust. In emerging economies and low-income countries with scarce resources and a shortage of doctors to support these devices, people may develop automation biases and trust these devices without much scrutiny, assuming comparable success in developed countries guarantees similar results in their own contexts. Later these countries have to pay higher prices for these AI medical devices (Rajesh et al., 2023).

AI may increase the productivity of low-skilled professionals as they can, in certain fields, quickly perform up to high-skilled professionals (Dell'Acqua et al., 2023). However, they may not enjoy higher income as the price of the products and services provided will lower given the increasing return of capital with reduced or the same labor. The illusion of mastery among low-skilled professionals may prevail. They may rely on AI and not adequately understand relevant functions or have the relevant knowledge when the AI tool is taken away or does not perform as expected (Felten et al., 2023). They will also lose opportunities to learn how to judge and become mature in their learning. Furthermore, AI also demoralizes those who cannot move to other industries while their jobs are automated. For example, AI disrupts these artists' livelihoods today. The mimicry model replaces these artists by using their often copyrighted art as training data and later creates new art imitating the original artist's creative properties or using the materials to create new properties without claiming any debt to the original art (Harris, 2023).

When the technocrats advocate for the advancement of AI that can imitate essential human characteristics like creativity, empathy, and learning, we may not respect those skills, characteristics, and virtues that take years to develop for humans. For example, empathy is an incarnate ability and needs to be developed through daily practices. If we think robots can provide us with emotional support, we will be hesitant to extend our efforts to express ourselves to other human beings since we can easily channel these

emotions to robots. This might solve a pressing temporal emotional problem but cannot develop our deeper connections to other human beings or to ourselves. People may lose their autonomy when they overly depend on AI tools for emotional support and decision-making (Sutton, 2024). It is unclear how prolonged reliance on AI for mental health support could impact clients' capabilities to connect with nature and others. Furthermore, the speed of spreading mass information that needs minimum intellectual and creative investment is shaping our habits of consuming information and our values of appreciating people's experience in skilled practices.

Given the commercial ambitions about investment in AI and the AI national race, the public may defer ethically and politically contentious AI issues to technocratic and government elites. Furthermore, we humans are divided among nations and these nations are often tempted to win the AI national race at the expense of basic human rights and values. With the current geopolitical context and space race-like event to develop the technology, it may become possible to mistakenly rationalize the value of mass killing, deportation, or even genocide for national protection. Some people perceive fear when their own countries constrain the capabilities of AI while their enemies fully utilize the capabilities of AI. Using AI for national surveillance can be justified at the expense of individual privacy or human life.

Key AI Questions and Core Human Values

AI generally focuses on the economics of scale, economic prosperity, and maximizing some notions of expected utility. The value of optimization of human preference may deny core basic human values (Tasioulas, 2022). AI is changing our understanding of the good life, the virtues of patience, thinking, knowledge, consciousness, emotions, society, good and evil, and the ultimate nature of the universe. AI is evolving rapidly, creating many potential promises and harms. AI can be deployed on a large scale and at a speedy rate without knowing whether the AI has been misaligned with current social norms and human values (Hinton, 2023a, 2023b; Russell, 2019, 2022, 2024). Many unknown emergent patterns will be generated from large language models while people have to keep fine-tuning preexisting data sets to increase their accuracy and fairness (Lapata, 2023; Woldridge, 2023; Zewe, 2022). When AI shares thousands of copies of the same model on a particular section of a large data set, human experts cannot as effectively and easily share their findings from different disciplines as AI models do. It must also be considered that eventually AI could escape human control and become an unaccountable machine (Davies, 2024). Wiener (1960) has already warned us that human can easily over-rely on automated machines to make decisions for themselves without questioning the purpose and potential negative consequences of using the automated machine. He said,

Though machines are theoretically subject to human criticism, such criticism may be ineffective until long after it is relevant. To be effective in warding off disastrous consequences, our understanding of our man-made machines should in general develop at the same rate with the performance of the machine. By the very slowness of our human actions, our effective control of the machines may be nullified. By the time we are able to react to the information conveyed by our senses and stop the car we are driving, it may already have run head on into a wall (p. 1355).

The overarching ethical principle in the AI system is adopting preference-based utilitarianism. AI systems are designed to maximize the fulfillment of human preferences that are shaped by human experience and cannot be easily known and quantified (Russell, 2022; Tasioulas, 2022). Societal ethics are unfortunately reduced to precision and an optimization of human preferences in the AI system. Furthermore, these preferences are shaped by powerful economic and government actors. They shape the preferences for their own power, not social wealth. Will the utilitarian thinking in the AI system confine us and neglect other human values such as justice, fairness, charity, hope, autonomy, friendship and play?

Bommasani et al. (2021) remind us of the unknown emerging properties of the foundation model which requires deep interdisciplinary collaboration. Defects of the foundation models will be inherited by specific applications and also incentivize harmonization. They said,

Despite the impending widespread deployment of foundation models, we currently lack a clear understanding of how they work, when they fail, and what they are even capable of due to their emergent properties.

AI is trained on pre-chosen sets of data for specified tasks. They cannot handle situations not captured by the pre-trained data set. Sheikh et al. (2023) said, "AI is associated with a distinct techno-economic paradigm characterized by continuous change to products and services, a largely hidden vertical structure of hardware and software, and the potential for technology to act autonomously" (p. 96). Using statistical optimization to find the patterns in the data may result in missing many interesting phenomena and alternatives as they are not described by the bell curve in the statistical analysis. Data used to train the foundation model often inherit all those historical and systemic biases, which can be transferred to the application models and further marginalize many minority groups. The Center for Research on Foundation Models remains dissatisfied with developers' data disclosure behavior (Bommasani et al., 2024). The explainability of the current foundational model and an assessment of the quality of data in the training of the foundation model are both still lacking. These foundation models can exacerbate social inequalities. It needs countless investments in training the

data and refining the foundation model to correct mistakes such as historical biases and hallucinations.

AI challenges all industries to reflect on the meaning of their existence. For example, journalists are encouraged to know how to use AI data to adapt to changing consumers' reading habits and be faithful to the mission to serve the civic information space. They will keep public trust and institutional integrity by informing the public of any misinformation of the data (Murray, 2024). Educators must reconsider the purpose of education and adapt their pedagogies to enhance access and equity, foster human connections, enrich learning experiences, and build emotional resilience. Students should also be encouraged to apply compassion and creativity to tackle real-world challenges.

We need to be aware of the new paradigm created by AI systems and the societal and communal core values that might be denied or ignored by AI. When AI issues are treated as primarily technical issues solved by experts, we may ignore our own character development and other people's well-being. What kind of person will we become when we practice to achieve certain outcomes at faster rates and lower costs? What virtues will be cultivated when patience is not valued? When corporate leaders are anxious to seek opportunities created by AI and want to get ahead of their competition, they have shown a willingness to take higher risks to speed up and scale their deployment of AI that may end up harming human beings and society in the long-run (Murray, 2024). Will safety be treated only after problems arise? Who is most vulnerable to the risks of faulty AI systems in the current global market economy? When we are used to communicating with AI machines, will we forget that it is a machine? Will our communication with AI machines increase our illusion of mastery and reduce our implementation abilities in reality? Will the loser in this ruthless AI competition be justified to bear the cost of AI disruption or AI mistakes created by emerging properties of generative AI systems? Will our rationalization of AI adaptability and responsibility deny basic human values like justice and dignity?

We need to think deeply about how we can have a broader engagement of people in the development and deployment of AI in different sectors such that AI will not "amplify and reproduce the forms of power it has been deployed to optimize" (Crawford, 2021, p. 224). How should flourishing ethics be incorporated into the AI system? How should our education system equip our students to know how to work closely with AI and also how to develop good practices that better incorporate broader values for human flourishing?

We need to demand AI companies to invest in the development of safe AI first and research human interfaces in AI design. What values are advocated in the process of development and deployment of AI systems? Can humans control AI systems? Do we

expect scientific and bureaucratic expertise to devise efficient and effective mechanisms for securing the goals of AI regulations even though AI is rapidly evolving beyond the benchmarks set by industries and politicians? Now, many business enterprises are motivated by the short-term benefits of integrating AI into their workplace and are doing their best to adapt as quickly as possible. We perceive that we can control AI when we are allowed to interrupt AI systems (Baker, 2020).

Why do we value mercy from other humans and not from robots? Why will patients be angry when they find out that the apology letters they received from doctors were written by AI? Why do humans still value human connections in many crucial legal and medical judgments and decisions? Tasioulas (2022) explained we need human judges rather than robot judges because we value human accountability while “autonomous machines that do not have a share in human solidarity and cannot be held accountable for their decisions in the way that a human judge can” (p. 238). We want “the ideal of reciprocity among fellow citizens that is central to the rule of law” (p. 237) even though the autonomous machine may have better transparency, procedural fairness, and explainability than human judges.

What is the intrinsic value of actual labor? Will the benefit of automation convince employers to replace select occupations with AI? What is the collective vision of an AI-ecosystem that supports human flourishing? Tasioulas (2022) concluded that “our focus must be properly integrating AI technology into a culture that respects and advances the dignity and well-being of humans, and the nonhuman animals with whom we share the world, rather than on the highly speculative endeavor of integrating the dignity of intelligent machines into our existing ethical framework” (p. 240). How do we preserve our genuine human interactions in an increasingly automated work environment?

Can humans cede basic levels of thinking and skill-acquisition processes to AI and instead focus on higher-order thinking skills based on AI outputs? The concern is that when basic skills are ceded to machines, humans lose the opportunity to develop higher-ordered skills through scaffolding. This could result in many superficial users who over-rely on machines and accept AI solutions without questions. Conversely, sophisticated users will know how to effectively prompt and input tasks for AI, using their prior knowledge to judge the validity of the information. Some may apply ethical principles when working with AI, continually questioning their purposes for using AI and resisting being controlled by machines. Their experience of using AI as professional development tools and their communication with AI must be learned by superficial users.

AI co-evolves with society and changes our expectations about the functions of AI and the meanings of intelligence provided by AI. As AI becomes associated with prolonged processes of social and technological co-evolution, we can collectively question how

economic and political structure, power, and the dynamics of social (in) justices created by AI generate more dialogues on what needs to be changed for more people to economically and socially flourish (Fassin & Das, 2021). Without productive questioning, we cannot easily adapt to the changes and expect a better return without paying attention to the direction of the technology. Sheikh et al. (2023b), “The development of system technologies is often unpredictable, and their effects cannot be fully anticipated...The generic nature of such technologies implies that they have the potential to affect all public values” (p. 100). It is essential to provide a better environment for the development and deployment of AI for public benefit and develop a collective vision of better ecosystems for human flourishing.

Recommended Practices

Both the World Health Organization (WHO, 2023) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2023) affirm the immense potential of AI to transform healthcare and education. They propose to develop safe and equitable AI ecosystems to promote human flourishing. For example, AI should enhance human capabilities to build inclusive digital futures for all and should never be an authoritative source of knowledge on whatever topic it engages with (UNESCO, 2023). In health care policy, AI should protect autonomy; promote well-being, human safety, and the public interests, ensure transparency, explainability, and intelligibility; foster responsibility and accountability; ensure inclusiveness and equity; and promote AI that is responsive and sustainable (WHO, 2023). Inclusive growth dialogues such as global tax regimes for the digital age, global competition policy, intellectual property rights, data and information policy, and new transparency regulations must be adopted to share economic prosperity around the globe (Geiger & Iaia, 2024; Lee, 2024). AI innovation should be steered toward more labor-using and greater shared prosperity (Korinek et al., 2021; Partnership on AI, 2022). Advanced economic should prioritize AI innovation and integration for better products and services for human flourishing, instead of just focusing on saving labor and lowering the cost of production (Aghion et al., 2021). They should provide robust regulatory frameworks to guide these “superstar” AI companies. Emerging economies and lower-income countries are supported to have more investment in digital infrastructure and a digitally competent workforce. Emerging economies and poor countries have to discern what AI-labor devices, rather than AI-labor-saving devices should be adopted.

The public is educated enough to know what AI is and is incentivized enough to balance the dominant perspectives of a select few rich technology companies. “An efficient and effective government, a well-functioning financial system, the absence of corruption, and civic stability are all important in supporting families, work, education, and religious communities in the promotion of individual flourishing; and the study of how more macro-and state-level factors influencing human flourishing is needed as

well.” (VanderWeele, 2017). Russell (2024) advised that the only visible long-term option is to have mathematically guaranteed and provably beneficial AI. He urged the development of safe AI rather than an AI-safe culture. We need to construct and design safe AI first and determine the goals first before the design. This recommended practice goes against the current norms of the development and deployment of AI that seek to develop AI capabilities first, then constrain the capabilities for safety, and finally define the goals of the AI after mistakes are found in the pre-existing training data.

Policy-makers and regulators are recommended to introduce all technical, social, economic, and scientific dimensions of AI systems in society (Bommansani et al., 2023) through the following five key tasks: clarify what AI is and focus on actual risks and opportunities (i.e., demystification); create a functional ecosystem to make AI work (i.e., contextualization); involve diverse stakeholders from civil society to address relevant values and interests affected by the use of AI technology (i.e., engagement); develop a directive framework (i.e., regulation); and engage wisely with other global actors (i.e., societies) (Sheikh et al., 2023b). These five tasks steer the process of co-development between technology and society. The progress of AI and the shared benefits of AI are most likely to be maximized in democratic societies that allow many stakeholders to contribute and control the direction of AI’s development (Acemoglu & Johnson, 2023). Thus, human beings need to be conscious of the dynamics between AI and the social, economic, political, and historical context that supports AI.

With good governance, AI can facilitate human flourishing. The good governance of AI encompasses a broad array of “processes of governing, whether undertaken by a government, market, or network, whether over a family, tribe, formal or informal organization, or territory, and whether through laws, norms, power, or language” (Bevir, 2012, p. 1). Individual developers must integrate ethical and legal issues much earlier in their design stage of AI. Organizational users must implement quality assurance and data governance policies. Local and international governments must enforce modified copyright laws, national guidelines, and intellectual property laws in an AI-driven world. We all need to address the three most important ethical issues raised by AI: privacy and surveillance, bias and discrimination, and accountability and transparency. The meaning of privacy indeed varies in different contexts, influenced by cultural, legal, and social factors. Understanding these nuances is critical for developing AI systems that respect privacy across diverse settings.

Conclusion and Future Research

AI is inevitably changing our work, values, and lives. With better public education about what AI is and a broad engagement of the public about the direction of AI, we can rebalance the power between AI technology companies and consumers. We must know what AI is and understand its limitations. The effectiveness of AI depends on the

contexts that support AI. We need to be conscious of our core human values such as genuine human contact and the dignity of work that are gradually being replaced by AI as the development of technology mainly focuses on the economics of scale, efficiency, and lower costs. The adoption process of mature AI technology into the familiar workflow needs to be monitored. We need safe AI rather than an AI safe culture! AI-innovation should be steered toward labor-using rather than labor-saving for greater justice. Advanced economics should prioritize AI innovation and integration, providing a robust regulatory framework and capital tax to ensure these few AI companies compensate those whose lives are disrupted. Emerging markets and low-income countries should invest in digital infrastructure and a digitally competent workforce, adapting AI labor-using, rather than labor-saving purposes. The co-development process between society and technology should involve wider stakeholder participation to enhance human flourishing in an AI-driven world. More stakeholders need to be invested in the discourse around AI systems and demand higher safety and security standards from these technology companies. There is no autonomous system that must be held accountable for the result: humans and human lives will always be held accountable. Inclusive global dialogues that enable emerging economies and low-income countries to have voices and be compensated fairly in the global competition policy, intellectual property rights, data and information policy, and new transparency regulations must be adopted.

More research needs to be conducted about human-system interaction and communication (Eshelman et al., 2012; Lyreskog et al., 2023; Vaill, 1989).

These are future research questions:

1. How to solve AI's inequality problems?
2. How can the benefits of AI be shared by more people, specifically those on the margins of power and wealth?
3. What new skills and knowledge do humans need to effectively communicate with AI, especially when steering AI innovation for labor-using rather than labor-saving for greater justice?
4. How do the development and deployment of AI challenge existing legal norms, such as copyright protection and antitrust laws, given that AI foundation models are currently being monopolized by a few companies?
5. What are the challenges posed by fragmented legal regulations governing AI when different countries do not harmonize their AI regulations while competing for national security interests?

Our current choices in understanding, using, and regulating AI systems will determine whether AI tools enable human flourishing or not. The integration of AI into our current social-political-technology systems must address current challenges such as

data quality, technical infrastructure, organizational capacity, responsible practices, global inequality and poverty, and power imbalance between the few AI “superstar” companies and emerging economies and low-income countries. Without proper interventions and steering AI innovation toward labor-using practices and greater shared prosperity, social and wealth inequality could increase, even among knowledgeable workers in developed countries. AI will increase inequality, poverty, and social and political unrest around the globe when inclusive growth dialogues are not quickly implemented. More people need to be educated about what AI is and collectively demand better AI ecosystems that respect the dignity of work, autonomy, justice, and community development.

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Using AI in Recruiting: Ethical and Practical Considerations

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Abstract

The allure of using artificial intelligence (AI) to streamline the recruiting process for organizations has become increasingly compelling. Identifying ways to make recruiting more efficient and effective provides an organization with a competitive advantage (Hunkenschroer & Luetge, 2022). The capacity for AI to review massive amounts of information in a short timeframe helps close the gap between recruiters and top-quality candidates (Gray, 2024). However, as an imperfect science, the AI algorithms that undergird recruiting tools may lead to discrimination and bias with unintended yet impactful consequences (Bansal et al., 2023). Biases already existing in the data that fuels AI may skew outcomes from recruiting tools, and AI may introduce new types of biases not yet studied (Ntoutsis et al., 2020). The following conceptual study seeks to examine where in the recruitment process AI adds value, where AI adds risk, and where AI should not replace human effort and interaction.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, AI, recruiting, unconscious bias, intuition, human intelligence.

Introduction

The allure of using artificial intelligence (AI) to streamline organizations' recruiting efforts continues to increase (Kochan, 2021). Companies are competing to find and hire talent for over 8 million job openings (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024); therefore, finding ways to make the recruitment process more efficient and effective provides an organization with a competitive advantage (Hunkenschroer & Luetge, 2022). The capacity for applied and generative AI to quickly review vast information closes some of the gaps between recruiters and candidates (Gray, 2024). The following conceptual study reviews the impact of AI in the recruiting space, with broader organizational impacts also examined.

Impact of AI in Recruiting

AI collects, analyzes, and interprets large volumes of data based on the instructions and suppositions programmed into its machine-learning algorithms (Bansal et al., 2023; Ntoutsi et al., 2020). As an imperfect science, AI algorithms sometimes lead to discrimination and bias with unintended yet impactful consequences (Bansal et al., 2023). The data leveraged by AI originates from humans; thus, the bias that exists in humans exists in the data, which AI then perpetuates and amplifies (Hurlburt, 2024; Lee et al., 2019; Ntoutsi et al., 2020). Data sets that are incomplete or do not contain enough information about underrepresented groups add another source of bias to AI (Lee et al., 2019). Generative AI learns over time; thus, even if discriminatory attributes are not noticeable in an algorithm, AI can learn to discriminate on a protected attribute or highly correlated inputs if trained to do so during iterative interactions with users.

Organizations hold responsibility for ensuring equitable, unbiased recruiting processes and outcomes; in previous eras, such decisions were made by humans and governed by fairness and equity laws (Lee et al., 2019). However, as companies now weave AI tools into their recruitment processes, biases on race, age, sex, and other protected qualities infiltrate decision-making (Ntoutsi et al., 2020). Biases already existing may skew outcomes even more, and AI may introduce new types of biases not yet studied.

Additionally, AI technologists retain responsibility for understanding bias issues in candidate screening and selection, ensuring their programs do not create or perpetuate discrimination (Ntoutsi et al., 2020). Testing AI algorithms for over- or under-representing specific protected characteristics requires intentionality and an ethical focus. Ntoutsi et al. called for ethical principles to be integrated into AI algorithms to mitigate such bias, because error-laden algorithms cause unfair and illegally discriminatory recruitment outcomes (Mittelstadt et al., 2016). However, the feasibility of defining the ethical requirements of AI algorithms remains laden with complexity, subjectivity, and uncertainty.

Practical Application

Recruiters can leverage AI to scan databases for candidate sourcing, provide answers or interview scheduling with candidates through chatbots, and review large volumes of résumés in a fraction of the time (Wolford & GPT-4, 2023). Using AI for high-volume administrative tasks frees up bandwidth for recruiters to perform more strategic-level duties, including building relationships with the candidates. The candidates also benefit through potentially experiencing up to 75% improvement in time to hire. Compelling reasons to use AI technologies in the recruitment process abound (Kochan, 2021); however, cases of AI bias leading to systemic discrimination and legal recourse continue to occur, as shown in the following examples.

A credit card provider used AI to facilitate different credit limits based on the applicant's gender (Knight, 2019). Vincent (2016) reported that Microsoft's *Tay* AI program issued racist and misogynistic content after only one day of interacting with users. Using AI for loan decisions was shown to increase discrimination against females to increase lenders' profits (University of Bath, 2024). Dastin (2018) shared that Amazon's recruitment AI assessed female candidates less favorably than male candidates for technical roles (Lee et al., 2019). These examples illustrate the industry-agnostic impact of AI-facilitated bias and discrimination.

AI can be programmed for simple tasks, such as sorting and filtering lists, or complex tasks, such as running predictive models (Koshiyama et al., 2022). Recent research on the use of AI in healthcare applications suggests that AI can find patterns and correlations in large data sets better and faster than humans can and have the potential to make predictions from those patterns; such findings could prove relevant in the recruiting space as well (Roa & Biller-Andorno, 2023). This information may prove especially beneficial at aggregated levels to identify trends. However, consideration should be given to validating the information before basing actions on predictions; humans' critical thinking skills are paramount in validating AI-generated information and filtering out fallacies (Hurlburt, 2024).

Some applicant tracking systems (ATS) do not yet integrate seamlessly with AI tools, so the additional cost of adding AI solutions prevents some organizations from implementing such programs (J. Hill, personal communication, September 16, 2024). Other recruiters have experimented with AI in enhancing job descriptions or building interview questions but have observed lackluster results so far (M. Edge, personal communication, September 16, 2024). Ultimately, the hope is for AI tools to make the recruiting process more streamlined and efficient, but that goal will only become reality when the tool verifiably improves workflow time while providing ethical, reliable, and transparent outputs (Kochan, 2021).

One approach to controlling AI algorithms includes locking them rather than permitting AI to continuously learn (Youssef et al., 2023). Locked algorithms can be vetted for ethical and quality outputs. However, adding updated information into locked algorithms negates the previously vetted versions, necessitating the time and effort of completing a new reliability assessment (Roa & Biller-Andorno, 2023; Youssef et al., 2023). In an era of informational urgency, one wonders if organizations or their workers will tolerate the time required to continually reaffirm locked algorithms (Hurlburt, 2024).

Broader societal expectations have emerged to form a backdrop for organizations' ethical use of AI. For example, the European Union defined seven requirements for trustworthy AI systems, including human oversight, non-discrimination, and fairness

(European Commission High-Level Expert Group on AI, 2019). President Joseph Biden issued Executive Order 14110 in October of 2023 to provide the United States government with the responsibility to ensure AI is safely and responsibly used (U.S. Department of Labor, 2024). The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission requires the use of AI in hiring decisions to comply with federal civil rights laws and provides guidelines on how organizations should monitor AI in recruiting to prevent “disproportionately large negative effects” based on protected characteristics (U.S. Department of Labor, 2024, Other Federal Agencies, para. 3). AI technology will continue to develop rapidly; therefore, societies must revisit the legal expectations regularly and provide clear guidelines for users and organizations.

Recommendation

Using AI to help write job posts and provide data-driven scans of résumés can reduce subjectivity and produce a more diverse candidate pool (Hunkenschroer & Luetge, 2022). Organizations attempt to reduce subjectivity in the recruiting process, but thus far, AI has not proven to be a perfect solution (Dastin, 2018). Technologists who understand recruitment bias and work to build nondiscriminatory algorithms could build valuable AI tools that enhance recruitment processes (Bird et al., 2020; Kroll et al., 2017); however, human intelligence will still be needed, and the impacts of AI tools on the workforce cannot be overlooked (Kochan, 2021).

Nobel Prize-winning psychologist Daniel Kahneman’s recruiting process example highlighted the importance of human intuition in hiring (Grant, 2023). In a podcast, Kahneman explained a study whereby he intentionally delayed the process step where intuition was applied; he provided the data and relevant assessments of a candidate first and then allowed hiring decision-makers to reflect on that data using their intuition, ultimately deciding whether a candidate would be hired. The outcome of Kahneman’s study showed that when decision-makers consumed the data first and then had time to apply their intuition, a technique specifically called “delayed intuition,” their judgment call became highly predictive of a great hire.

Kahneman’s study provided an example of the value that systems and data, as well as human intelligence and intuition bring to the recruiting decision-making process (Grant, 2023). Adding the topic of AI to this context suggests that a practical approach to recruiting may be: (1) AI-driven sourcing and screening, (2) additional data, if possible, such as work style tests, (3) the human-to-human interview, and lastly, (4) time for the hiring decision-makers to decide through delayed intuition. In that order, those steps blend AI and human components so the result should be the best-fit hires. AI tools, in this scenario, support and complement the human aspects of recruiting rather than replacing them (Lee et al., 2019).

At each step in the process, AI interventions should be developed with a focus on removing bias and proactively analyzed to ensure that candidate bias, discrimination, and other such adverse outcomes are identified and mitigated (Bird et al., 2020). Organizations cannot implement AI to gain efficiency in their recruiting processes and assume a passive stance on outcomes; instead, both technical and legal experts should review recruiting algorithms before use and continually audit the outcomes (Knight, 2019; Kroll et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2019). Adding in reporting and auditing proves cost-effective only if AI provides efficiencies and improvements that outweigh the cost of AI oversight (Youssef et al., 2023).

Further Research Considerations

The ethical and fair use of AI requires intentionality, oversight, and trust from society (Bird et al., 2020). AI brings unprecedented opportunities, many of which have the potential impact of harming certain person groups. Governance remains vital to ensure accountable and socially just use of AI. Further research on how governance should be applied merits investigation. Perhaps a new industry will surface for quality, reliability, transparency, and ethical checking of AI algorithms and outputs (Koshiyama et al., 2022). AI possesses no conscience, empathy, or inherent morality, so the onus is on society, developers, and users to address the ethical issues AI creates (Hurlburt, 2024).

Lastly, the responsibility of AI developers and purveyors should be researched and defined robustly, with ethics, accountability, transparency, and bias mitigation as critical factors. “A massive investment in continuous (life-long learning) education and training” will be required to equip technical developers and workforce users (Kochan, 2021, p. 20). Accountability only works well if the developers and users understand the AI tools’ ethical considerations and potential impacts. Therefore, upskilling purveyors and users of AI holds critical importance, and as the technology accelerates at unprecedented rates, ongoing learning will become instrumental to organizations’ successful use of AI (Hurlburt, 2024).

About the Author

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Bridge-Building Leadership and Human Flourishing in Galatians: Traversing Ethnic, Socioeconomic, and Gender Barriers

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Abstract

Most contemporary delineations of human flourishing lack the theistic assertion grounding humanity's thriving in the Creator's design. A holistic biblical definition of flourishing accounts for humanity's psychological, physical, existential, moral, and social health as God's image-bearers and stewards of his dominion on earth. The book of Galatians presents one of the New Testament's most compelling explanations of human flourishing. This paper examines the Apostle Paul's subclaims in Galatians 3:28 on ethnic (Jew/Greek), socioeconomic (enslaved/free), and gender (male/female) division in view of the theme of bridge-building leadership. My argument begins with a survey of the historical and literary background of the verse, proceeds to its implications for leadership theory, and then discusses the present-day applications of the bridge-building paradigm.

Introduction

Human flourishing (or "well-being" or "thriving") underscores a holistic state of health. Empirical studies of human flourishing frequently focus on psychological and physical well-being (Joseph, 2015). In cooperation with the Harvard Institute for Quantitative Social Science, VanderWeele's (2017) definition of human flourishing encompasses mental and physical health but also includes "happiness and life satisfaction, meaning and purpose, character and virtue, and close social relationships" (p. 8148).

VanderWeele presented a more inclusive approach; however, what is still lacking is the theistic assertion grounding human thriving in the Creator's intentions for humanity. Fashioned in God's image (*imago Dei*), humanity is purposed to fill and have dominion throughout the earth. A holistic theist definition of flourishing thus accounts for humanity's psychological, physical, existential, moral, and social health as God's image-bearers and stewards of his earthly dominion.

The biblical foundations for human flourishing trace to the first chapter of scripture. According to Genesis 1 (unless otherwise noted, all scripture in this paper is from the *New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition*, 2001), God gave the only facet of creation bearing the divine “image,” humanity, “dominion” over the earth to “fill” and “subdue” it (vv. 26–28). The writer of Psalm 115 elaborated on the same theme, pointing to humanity’s “increase” and that they would “be blessed” as stewards of the earth (vv. 14–16). In arguably the New Testament’s foremost affirmation of human flourishing, the Apostle Paul admonished the church in Galatia, for “There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). Jewett (1975) described this verse as the “magna carta of humanity” (p. 142). Drawing from the precedent of liberties granted in the 13th century by the English royal charter under the threat of civil war, Jewett discerned in the apostle’s words the basis of the gospel’s freedom.

This paper examines the theme of bridge-building in Galatians 3:28 in light of Paul’s subclaims on ethnic (Jew/Greek), socioeconomic (enslaved/free), and gender (male/female) division. Some have interpreted this verse strictly in terms of individual rights, while others have construed it as a reference to an abstract spiritual status such as justification. Notwithstanding, Paul is making a rudimentary statement about the path to human flourishing rooted in collective, prejudice-transcending identity in Christ. I proceed by uncovering the historical and literary background of the verse and then assess its implications considering leadership theory, underscoring its contribution in view of the principles of bridge-building leadership. Finally, I consider present-day applications for the Galatians bridge-building model.

Human flourishing is at the heart of Pauline theology. Foster (2024) applied Paul’s 1 Corinthians 13 teaching on Christian love to nurturing an emotional climate favorable to flourishing in the healthcare workplace environment. Galatians provides an incisive claim for theological egalitarianism as the bedrock of flourishing in Christian mission and business. In the 21st-century globalized world, advances in communications technology and transportation have opened new avenues for the exchange of ideas, services, and economic resources. Nevertheless, deep-seated ethnic, racial, class, and gender barriers endure.

Studies have highlighted the significance of cross-cultural leadership from the perspective of global missions (Franklin, 2017; Plueddemann, 2009). Alongside the missions field halfway around the world, today more than ever Christian leaders have a platform to engage the cultural “other” at home in everyday life and places of business. Studies have concentrated on reconciliation leadership from the standpoint of resolution after international conflict (Bargal & Sivan, 2004; Nelson & Gizzi, 2021). This paper pursues a holistic, biblical paradigm for bridge-building, bringing together the

resources of cross-cultural and reconciliation leadership with strategies addressing the broader concerns of race, class, and gender.

Galatians 3:28 in Context

In Paul's letter to the Galatians, we are confronted with one of the foundational interpretive principles of the Epistles – the first Christians were Jewish and therefore thought the ceremonial observance of the law would continue. Gentiles coming into the fold challenged this assumption (Silva, 1994). Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; Gal. 2:8), penned the letter (ca. AD 55) to address the concerns of the newly established churches in the Greek city of Galatia (corresponding to the Asian portion of modern-day Turkey).

The Galatians were confronted with a peculiar false teaching. A group identifying as Christians was pressuring Greek Christ-followers into accepting the many obligations of the Law of Moses – “special days and months and seasons and years” (4:10), and especially circumcision (2:12, 6:12–15). Paul's Galatian opponents were likely of Jewish background, given their preoccupation with the law and tie to Jerusalem (4:24–31) and James (stationed over the Jerusalem church, 2:11–12). They insisted one must belong to the Jewish nation to receive the benefits of justification (2:14–16) and emphasized continuity with Hebrew monotheism, diminishing the significance of the crucified Christ (Boice, 1994; Martyn, 1997). Paul wrote to alleviate the burden the false teachers had placed on the Gentiles in the interest of promoting harmony between them and the Jewish Christians (2:14–3:21). The argument in Chapters 3 and 4 hinges on the contrast between the old covenant of “flesh” (based on “works of the law”) and the new covenant of “faith” (based on the “Spirit”). Chapters 5 and 6 outline the path of the faith-filled life, consisting in Christian freedom, the Spirit's fruits, and burden-carrying love.

Paul's discourse on the contrast between the old and new way is elaborated in Chapter 3 as redemption from the law's “curse” – death – through the Cross: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us” (v. 13). God's promise to Abraham of blessing and inheritance unites the old covenant of the law with the new covenant paradigm encompassing the Gentiles so that the Greeks might also “receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (v. 14). Before the way of faith was revealed, the law brought subjection, placing its adherents “under the law” (*hypo nomos*, v. 23). Humanity was “subject to the law” as our “disciplinarian” (v. 25; the phrase *hypo nomos* is also found in 4:21 and 5:18). The law subjects to three dire realities: first, to futility, since no matter how hard one tries, it is impossible to uphold the entire law (v. 10); second, to death, implicit in the “curse” of verses 10–13 (an allusion to the curse of the Fall in Gen. 2:16–17 and 3:19); and third, subjection's tangible effect in the present life is the social hierarchy and subordination assumed in 3:28.

While 3:28's erasure of boundaries encompasses spiritual status (e.g., justification and the nature of salvation benefits), it also applies within a social framework. Hove (1999) insisted that "the principles Paul has provided do have behavioral ramifications" (p. 121). The freedom expressed in 28a presupposes a three-tiered axis of subjection characterizing ancient Judaism. Under the law, subjection was driven by spiritual privileges allotted to the Jews over the Gentiles, the free over the enslaved, and men over women. As God's chosen people and keepers of the law and sacred rites (especially circumcision), Jewish identity was frequently tied to religious superiority. Earlier in Galatians, we read that Peter, the apostle to the Jews, had succumbed to the Jewish legalists, separating himself from the Gentiles (2:11-12). The Pharisees embodied Jewish religious haughtiness, lording rigid adherence to the law over their students to be praised by others (Matt. 23:1-36). As Keener (2014) suggested, Christianity "formed the only bridge between Jews and Gentiles" (p. 532).

Paul's next subclaim pertains to socioeconomic discrimination, hinging on the master-servant structure of first-century society. While it is possible that Paul implied the abolishment of the institution of slavery, at the very least, he was declaring it irrelevant (e.g., 1 Cor. 7:21-24). In Galatians 5, Paul enshrined the attitude of a "servant": "Through love serve one another" (5:13; *English Standard Version*, 2016). In the preface of the Ephesians household code, Paul upended the social hierarchy of his day in the summons for mutual subjection (5:21), implying that even the household head (*paterfamilias*) is to subject himself to servants.

The third form of inequality is that of gender. Under ancient Judaism, only men participated in the spiritual sign of the old covenant – circumcision. Moreover, only men had direct access to God – as priests. The gender equality inherent in 3:28 is closely rooted in the *imago Dei* of the Genesis creation account. Paul's usual way of referring to gender couplings was with the terms "man" and "woman" (Rom. 7:2-3; 1 Cor. 7:2; 11:9-12) or "husband" and "wife" (1 Cor. 7:2; 11:2-7; Eph. 5:22-33). In 3:28, he used the nouns "male" and "female." His language is an exact match to Genesis 1:27: "So God created humans in his image, in the image of God he created them; *male and female* [emphasis added] he created them" (cf. 5:2).

Moreover, of the three distinctions (Jew/Greek, slave/free, and male/female), only the last uses "and" (*kai*): "male *and* [emphasis added] female." The others take "or" (*oude*). Paul's use of "and" for the male/female couplet once again mirrors the language of the creation narrative, presupposing the principle of gender parity premising scripture. He envisaged parity rooted in a renewal of the primeval harmony that existed before humanity's judgment depicted in Genesis 3 (Fee, 2011; Keener, 2019).

The salient tie to baptism (Gal. 3:27) and prevalence of parallel formulas in 1 Corinthians 12:13 and Colossians 3:11 has led some scholars to surmise that verse 28 is

Christianity's "oldest creed," exhibiting the raw material of a baptismal confession. Regardless of whether the verse's content predates Paul, by including these words, the apostle was making a foundational claim reiterated with each new entrant into Christ's body (Dreyer, 2019; Patterson, 2018). The climax of Chapter 3 (and the whole of the letter) in this verse means that the full realization of God's cosmic reconciliation does not stop with the joining of Jew and Greek but extends to class and gender reconciliation.

Bridge-Building Leadership, Galatians 3:28, and Renewal of the *Imago Dei*

Graves (2024) described the value of a leadership model that sees the beauty in diversity, ever reaching for "a bridge of inclusivity" (p. 244). Bridge-building leadership pivots on a cross-cultural and relational paradigm that welcomes the cooperation of men and women of diverse backgrounds working in tandem to stem the tides of discrimination and abuse. Such a model hinges on the renewal of the *imago Dei* exemplified in Adam and Eve's primeval beauty. Genesis 1 depicts the triune God crafting humanity in the *imago Dei*, "Let us make humans in our image" (emphasis added; v. 26). The eternal Three-in-One, embodying beauty in diversity, fashioned human beings in the same likeness. Humanity exhibited diversity in the coupling of male and female to conduct their creational mission to extend God's dominion throughout the earth (vv. 26 and 28). As the supreme human expression of divine beauty, gender diversity in the *imago Dei* foreshadowed the revelation of God's beauty throughout creation. Adam and Eve filled and subdued the earth, reconciling all creatures of land, sky, and sea under God's exclusive rule. Bridge-building leadership seeks to recover the prelapsarian harmony of the Garden of Eden. The sin, curse, and the Fall of Genesis 3 dislodged humanity from seamless union with the divine, corrupting God's perfect image in us and destining us to toil, perverted desires, and division. Although defaced, God's image has not been lost. Biblical bridge-building leadership provides an avenue to renewing the portrait of flourishing in Genesis 1–2.

At the heart of bridge-building leadership is reconciliation first to the Creator and then to one another, supplying the peace, virtue, and unity embodied in human flourishing. The three-pronged contour of reconciliation depicted in Galatians 3:28 – ethnic, class, and gender – constitutes the conditions for our flourishing. According to Barentsen (2024), foundational to bridge-building is acknowledging the multidimensional differences responsible for the divisions ("gaps"). Ethnoracial, socioeconomic, and gender-based divisions create the need for reconciliation and cannot be resolved until they are confessed.

Barentsen (2024) outlined four foundational presuppositions of bridge-building leadership: (a) "Gaps can be bridged," (b) "bridging the gap does not eliminate it," (c)

“bridges require continual maintenance,” and (d) “social gaps are socially constructed and thus open to leadership influence” (p. 9). The first presupposition underscores the optimism of bridge-building leadership. Whatever the division is, it is conquerable. The second and third imply the ongoing attention the gaps require after the bridge is erected. The fourth suggests that the cause of the gaps is a systemic social one, residing in humanity’s nature (e.g., on account of sin and the Fall) and as such demands a communal response. In summary, while our divisions are surmountable, bridging them requires diligent upkeep according to biblical leadership principles.

Barentsen (2024) suggested that bridge-building leadership “connects intuitively with many leadership experiences and scholarly disciplines” enabling “lively interdisciplinary dialogue” (p. 11). Still, as evident in its metaphorical meaning, bridge-building implicitly contrasts with other leadership models, including the “transformative,” “authentic,” and “servant” approaches (Barentsen, 2024, p. 11). I would suggest that servant leadership, because of its foundational significance biblically, is highly commensurate with the bridge-building model. Despite the methodological difference – the latter concentrates on gaps to be reconciled – being a Christian leader who serves first means representing the Cross – God’s cosmic act of reconciling the world to himself in all of life.

The Cross embodied the self “emptying” (*kenoō*) demeanor of a servant – God divested of dignity and status to span the chasm of humanity’s sin through sacrificial death. Jesus taught bridge-building that pivoted on *kenotic* (self-emptying) servant leadership. He enshrined the one who gives of (empties) themselves to better others:

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me. (Matt. 25:35–36)

While one might be inclined to give food, drink, accommodation, clothing, treatment, or companionship to the high and lofty in earnest of status advancement, Jesus lauded those who do so for the “least of these” (vv. 40, 45). The self-giving ethic Jesus prescribed encompasses overcoming the ethnic (the “stranger”) and socioeconomic (the materially deprived) gaps characteristic of bridge-building. The founder of the contemporary servant leadership movement, Robert Greenleaf (2002), described Jesus’ instruction here as a “test” of “humanity” (p. 337). Meeting this test’s demands through biblical (servant first) bridge-building promotes human flourishing. Such flourishing does have advancement in view, although that of a qualitatively different kind – the complete renewal of the *imago Dei* for the inheritors of “eternal life” (Matt. 25:46).

Bridge-Building Leadership in Action Today

The traversing of ethnic boundaries in Galatians through the uniting of Jews and Greeks prefigured Paul's culminating assertion of flourishing in 3:28. Freedom from the law's subjection is all-inclusive, encompassing class and gender reconciliation. The true gospel's superiority is marked by the renunciation of all forms of discrimination.

Ethnoracial Reconciliation

Traversing the gap between Jews and Greeks can be realized today through cultivating multiethnic churches and developing faith-based responses to international conflict. Churches have an opportunity to sow seeds of bridge-building across ethnic and racial lines. More than a half century since Martin Luther King Jr. decried the Sunday 11 AM hour as the "most segregated hour in America" (cited in Bartlett, 2013), the nation's churches remain largely divided ethnoracially (Cooper, 2017). Although some improvement is evident, it is marginal. Lipka (2014) reported that eight in ten U.S. congregants worship at ethnoracially homogenous churches (where a single ethnic or racial group comprises at least 80% of the congregation). Cooper (2017) maintained that American churches must answer for this discrepancy as other sectors of society make immense ground toward desegregation, proposing that the path forward entails White people disavowing "their traditional privilege, power, and economic advantages" and some Black people having to give up "their privileged places in black churches" (p. 138).

In a time of warring nations and territorial disputes, Christians have an opportunity to explore faith-based international conflict resolution and reconciliation. Several such efforts are already under way to mitigate the Israeli-Hamas conflict. The Presbyterians for Middle East Peace seeks justice for both sides through a two-state solution. The organization's publication *Peace and Faith* (Nelson & Gizzi, 2021) represents an ecumenical attempt to address recent and age-old debates, bringing together Catholic, Episcopalian, Jewish, Mennonite, and Presbyterian contributors. Nelson (2021) was critical of the politically left anti-Zionist movement, which underscores human rights abuses against Palestinians while ignoring more heinous crimes by more repressive groups like the Assad and ISIL regimes. Gizzi (2021) took issue with the Palestinian-led BDS (i.e., boycott, divestment, sanctions) movement and its many restraints on Israel, noting possibilities for Christian programs (e.g., the Jerusalem International YMCA and Arab-Jewish Community Centers) to promote reconciliation and shared society.

Bar-Siman-Tov (2004) observed that the concept of reconciliation has only recently gained interest among peace studies researchers and practitioners. Conflict resolution's benefit in terminating a given conflict extends only so far. The resources of reconciliation afford stabilizing peace, prevent the emergence of new conflicts, and spur

both leaders and followers (in line with transformational leadership) onward to higher tiers of motivation and integrity (see also Bargal & Sivan, 2004; Burns, 1978). Reconciliation leads to character formation that promotes inner wholeness and an awareness of morals and values (Gomez, 2013b). Its ongoing, long-term effect fulfills the third presupposition of Barentsen's (2024) bridge-building leadership paradigm ("bridges require continual maintenance").

Auerbach (2004) suggested that the Judeo-Christian concept of forgiveness embodies the "spiritual-moral" glue of reconciliation (p. 153). The essential condition of this forgiveness is recognition on the part of one or both sides that injustice has been done. To the victims of extreme conflict (e.g., those suffering at the hands of the South African Apartheid regime), the act of apologizing may seem unrealistic. Gardner-Feldman (1999) averred that asking for forgiveness would seem "paralyzing" for many sufferers of extremely bloody conflict zones (p. 335). Nevertheless, the consensus among leaders and scholars is that asking for forgiveness to promote stable peace between enemies has vast potential (Auerbach, 2004; Cloke, 2001).

Socioeconomic Reconciliation

Several innovative initiatives extend the Galatians bridge-building paradigm to class inequalities. The concept of reconciliation is increasingly being applied beyond the arena of international diplomacy as a useful model for Christian mission (Kärkkäinen, 2016). In the global North, bridge-building often focuses on First Nation (Indigenous) and "latecomers" (immigrants from the late 20th and early 21st centuries). Habel (2013) suggested that reconciliation between Australia's Indigenous and non-Indigenous remains integral to the continent's spiritual fabric. The countries of North America are top destinations for migrants from around the world. Many of the United States' 1.2 million Korean immigrants, most arriving over the last few decades, have found a home among Presbyterian, Methodist, and Catholic churches (Jenkins, 2011). Some groups follow reverse and diasporan networks to renew the post-Christendom lands of the West. An example of vibrant multidirectional missions is the Brazilian Pentecostal ethnic church the Igreja da Promessa (Church of Promise) in San Jose, California. Founded by Swedish Assemblies of God ministers, the church has expanded among Brazilian migrants who chart family networks and new educational and economic opportunities to enrich the landscape of U.S. Christianity (Palma, 2022).

There are dozens of people groups from largely unevangelized countries with substantial immigrant populations (10,000 or more) across the United States and Canada (Payne, 2009). According to the Joshua Project (2024), several of the United States' most significant unreached peoples are of Arabic descent. The largest of these is the Urdu, an Indo-Aryan group numbering at 537,000. The Urdu consist of a more recent wave entering the country as refugees. Another group is the nomadic tribal

Pashtuns, primarily of Afghan and Pakistani origins, numbering at 155,000. The North American church has a strategic opportunity to build outreaches among these diasporan peoples, many of whom will venture beyond continental boundaries to impact the millions of unreached among their homeland populations.

Christianity's multiculturalism means that today almost every nation is both a mission field and a sending country as missionaries are being sent "from everywhere to everywhere." The aim of cross-cultural missions – whether in majority world nations or the global North among natives, migrants, and diasporas – is leadership development. After churches are planted, the labor of discipleship means building leaders (Plueddemann, 2009). The church depends on leaders to teach and nurture the many uniquely gifted members of Christ's body (1 Cor. 12:14–26). Through ministry partnerships, those from more opulent regions have a platform to build into and train missionaries from less affluent contexts.

Alongside church networks, cross-cultural bridge-building leadership is evident in numerous parachurch outreaches. One example is developed nations reaching majority world countries through medical and humanitarian aid. In a study of Minnesota Lutheran humanitarian relief in southern Madagascar, Halvorson (2018) revealed how contemporary Christian aid contributes to the globalizing of medicine while exposing worldwide medicine's resource inequalities.

Gender Reconciliation

Despite increasing egalitarianism that has opened opportunities for female education and employment, there remains a significant gender gap in injustices toward males and females. The 20th century witnessed remarkable gains in women's rights, from the right to vote (in 1920) to equal opportunity in the workplace (in 1964). Yet, in the home, centers of worship, and places of business, women continue to confront barriers that cast them as inferiors and scrutinize their ability as leaders. Beyond the litany of arguments delineating female roles in marriage, ministry, and the workplace (Chin, 2011; Piper & Grudem, 2021), the most palpable evidence of the unfair treatment of women is the overt discrepancy in instances of physical and sexual abuse. Women are significantly more likely than men to be the victims of sexual abuse, human trafficking, domestic and dating violence, workplace harassment, and stalking.

Acts of physical and sexual violence fall disproportionately on women and girls by a wide margin. Hull et al. (2016) reported that nearly 25% of college women have been victims of sexual assault. Among women aged 15–44, domestic violence is responsible for more adverse health and premature deaths than any other single cause (Healey, 2014). According to the Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, one in four U.S. women (26% or 33.5 million), compared to about one in twenty-six men (3.8% or 4.5

million), reported completed or attempted rape victimization at some point in their lifetime (Basile et al., 2022).

The American Psychological Association reported that 70% of the over 27 million human trafficking victims worldwide are women and girls (Novotney, 2023). In addition to food and sleep deprivation and often physical and sexual violence, women trafficking victims are also at elevated risk for many sexually transmitted infections and unsafe abortions (Dovydaitis, 2010). The violation of basic human rights involved in trafficking – and, for many, the toll of losing one’s childhood – results in severe long-term psychological effects, including depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress disorder. Among trafficking survivors, a significantly higher rate of women than men will experience such lasting effects (Novotney, 2023).

Despite protections introduced over the 20th century, workplace sexual harassment remains a major concern. The 1964 Civil Rights Act prohibited discriminatory employment practices, establishing equal opportunity for women in the workplace. Title VII of the act banned both forms of harassment: *quid pro quo* (the promise of promotion or the threat of demotion pending the exchange of sexual favors) and *hostile work environment* (severe verbal or physical conduct that interferes with work performance). Nevertheless, Jackson and Newman (2004) suggested that both forms continue “to define the work experience of many women and some men” (p. 706). Women are three times more likely than men to be sexually harassed in a public place (Basile et al., 2022).

President Jimmy Carter (2014), an evangelical in the Baptist tradition, described the pervasive system of discrimination against women:

This system is based on the presumption that men and boys are superior to women and girls, and it is supported by some male religious leaders who distort the Holy Bible, the Koran, and other sacred texts to perpetuate their claim that females are, in some basic ways, inferior to them, unqualified to serve God on equal terms. Many men disagree but remain quiet in order to enjoy the benefits of their dominant status. This false premise provides a justification for sexual discrimination in almost every realm of secular and religious life. Some men even cite this premise to justify physical punishment of women and girls. (pp. 1-2)

The distortion of scripture to justify patriarchalism and the ontological subordination of women cannot be taken lightly. Biblical bridge-building leadership seeks to correct false beliefs about women by erecting a gender theology rooted in the parity of men and women in the creation narrative’s *imago Dei*. Biblical equality based on God’s transcendent, gender-exceeding image – inscribing male and female’s shared mandate

and virtue – is paramount to differences expressed through gender (Hanson, 2023). Biblical leadership draws from sound hermeneutics anchored in scripture’s plain teaching before broaching contentious scriptures like Paul’s gender passages. We can glean from the scriptural instances of female exemplars like Deborah, Esther, Miriam, Huldah, and the many faithful women disciples recorded in the Gospels and Epistles, which remind us of the strength and dignity accorded women leaders even from ancient history (Land & Henson, 2024).

Another notable problem Carter (2014) identified is silence. There is the silence of the men who could make a change but do not. There is also the silence of the women who are assaulted and suffer trauma and are too afraid to tell someone. According to Rennison (2002), 63% of sexual assaults are not reported to the police. This discrepancy is even more pronounced on college campuses where more than 90% of sexual assault victims go unreported (Fisher et al., 2000). Several Christian and secular humanitarian organizations are working to prioritize gender equality as a core measure in meeting their goals. Thus, at the heart of bridge-building leadership for gender inequalities is amplifying the voices of disregarded women. The United Nations’s Commission on the Status of Women (n.d.) seeks to promote women’s status by publishing relevant data. Organizations such as Kenya’s Precious Women and Cambodia’s Chab Dai are traversing barriers and amplifying female voices through biblical gender-equality training programs (Haddad, 2021). Advocating for women’s voices in business enhances productivity, ethical leadership (“Women’s Leadership and Political Participation,” n.d.), and organizational effectiveness (“Facts and Figures: Economic Empowerment,” n.d.).

Conclusion

The Galatians bridge-building leadership paradigm establishes the foundational freedoms of the gospel, supplying core resources to recognize and surmount ethnoracial, socioeconomic, and gender gaps. Such an approach seeks to alleviate these gaps at their roots and restore those who have suffered discrimination, providing a holistic, egalitarian framework for human flourishing. Biblical bridge-building encourages actively seeking out marginalized voices while opening space for their voices to be heard.

Although the Galatians 3:28 bridge-building model is methodologically unique in its starting point, it is compatible with a range of other leadership approaches. It is consistent with the servant leadership emphasis on prioritizing the needs of others. The Galatians bridge-building model’s self-sacrificial component draws from the biblical kenotic (self-emptying) paradigm. Gomez (2013a) advanced a kenotic model for developing cross-cultural relationships with peoples of other faiths and cultures, acknowledging that such an approach “does not allow us to superimpose our own

views; instead, it asks that we be changed by the very encounter with the other person” (“A Better Model: *Kenosis*” section). This kenotic accent to bridge-building prioritizes others, making it compatible with the Galatians-based helping-others paradigm.

Bridge-building is also consistent with the Galatians’ courageous leadership model, emboldening us to venture beyond the barriers that divide us. Moreover, in view of the work of Morris (2020), bridge-building is closely tied to inclusive leadership, as the other side of the courage that reaches across the aisle to bring others in (see also Thompson & Matkin, 2020). Galatians bridge-building thus offers a robust framework for spiritual and social reconciliation in fulfillment of the creational mandate of human flourishing.

About the Author

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The Role of Individuation in Courageous Followership as Modeled by the Daughters of Zelophehad

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Abstract

In the annals of Hebrew history is an often-overlooked story of five women who stepped out of their cultural paradigm to request a correction to the Israelite law that not only benefitted them but their nation for generations. The story of the daughters of the Zelophehad in the book of Numbers, Chapter 27, depicts an example of the role followers play in increasing opportunities for humanity to flourish. Such followers, according to Chaleff (2009), may be considered courageous in that they move outside of the norm to challenge leaders to bring about change. In this paper, I use the du Tout et al. (2011) model of individuation in a psycho-hermeneutic exploration of how the psychological phenomenon empowers followers to be agents of change and contribute to human flourishing, which I define as environmental well-being for this paper.

Keywords: followers, followership, daughters of Zelophehad, individuation, psycho-hermeneutics, courageous followers

Introduction

In leadership studies, much is discussed about the traits, roles, responsibilities, and achievements of leaders. Central to their success and only gaining scholarly interest in the last few decades are those who follow them. Followers are defined as people who receive, accept, and implement actions according to the guidance of those to whom they report (Chaleff, 2009; Kellerman, 2008; Kelley, 2008; Treister & Schultz, 1997; Yukl, 2006). They are responsible for achieving the manager's objectives, the leader's vision, and the organization's mission. From this perspective, a follower may be responsible for leading others while being accountable to someone else. They may be referred to as staff, teams, associates, administrators, etc.. Whatever the label, the destiny of the organization is often shaped by the abilities and attitudes of those perceived as followers.

The current global environment of constant and swift changes requires a workforce that can take decisive action (Yukl, 2006). Organizational authorities must be supported by prepared and engaged workers who can function effectively. They must be comfortable with themselves and confident in their abilities. Such people, according to the theory of individuation, are those who have gone through a process of self-discovery during which they have become aware of their strengths and developed ways of handling their weaknesses. They have reached a place of empowerment based purely on their locus of control. Followership theorists classify such staff as courageous, stars, or diehards (Chaleff, 2009; Kellerman, 2008; Kelley, 2008).

Through a hermeneutical study of the daughters of Zelophehad, whose story is found in the biblical book of Numbers, Chapter 27, I seek to shed light on the formation of such character through the research question, What are the factors that contribute to the formation of exemplary followership. The story details how five women found themselves without a male protector in prenational patriarchal Israel. With no one to speak for them and no property rights of any type, the daughters of Zelophehad realized that they were the sole determiners of their destiny. The decision to address their plight publicly required breaking the societal norms of their culture, risking rejection and isolation. The confrontation of authority, however, proved to elevate the status of women and, thereby, the daughters of Zelophehad contributed to the flourishing of their nation. Studying their decision process through the lens of Jung's theory of individuation (du Toit et al., 2011; Kincel, 1975; Tyagi, 2008) explains character development that empowers followers to be agents of change in the modality of human flourishing.

Definition of Human Flourishing

Human flourishing is another term for human well-being and provides a framework for understanding what makes people happy (Anand, 2016; Case et al., 2023). The concept looks beyond economics as a tool for assessing components that contribute to happiness or well-being. Human flourishing, then, involves the ability to participate in activities and exercises that add value to life. Many of these are related to the mundane routines of living such as caring for oneself and loved ones, playing or watching games, shopping for groceries or clothing, and so forth. This provides a framework for understanding what establishes a state of well-being.

Well-being, however, may be tied to individual happiness, whereas flourishing may best describe a community, a society, or even an ecosystem. In this framework, researchers consider whether and how the environment meets the needs of its constituents. Some use the six areas of Maslow's hierarchy of needs as a benchmark (Case et al., 2023, pp. 2-3; Dhiman, 2011). The six areas – physiological, safety, love, esteem, self-actualization, and transcendence – are met according to importance, not in

any particular order. Weinberg (2011) explained, “Maslow tells us that as a need is satisfied, it largely disappears, and the individual begins new motivation new focus, to fulfill the next higher need” (p. 17). Thus, researchers seek to understand how the drivers and domains are interrelated. In some societies, human flourishing is intrinsic rather than extrinsic. Virtue and social relationships are valued more than consumables. Case et al. (2023) noted that a myriad of factors work together to create or define human flourishing, concluding that the environment is central to the phenomenon.

In this paper, human flourishing is defined as the common good for society as we consider the results of five women’s confrontation of patriarchal leadership of prenational Israel. According to Solum (2023), communities flourish when they create atmospheres that promote health, peace, and prosperity and when their systems nurture families through promoting human virtues and provide opportunities for “meaningful work and recreation” that facilitates social interactions (p. 1149). Through such a framework, all members of society may benefit. This study shows that the individuation of the daughters of Zelphehad helped them to contribute to the flourishing of their nation by enabling women to have a stronger role in the community.

The Theory of Individuation

The theory of individuation was developed by Carl Gustav Jung, the psychiatrist and founder of analytic psychology, to explain the human process of becoming self-aware (Kincel, 1975; Tyagi, 2008). Jung considered the psyche the centrality of human experience and knowledge – conscious and unconscious. According to the theory, the psyche and the physical being grow and develop together. The unconscious is a conglomerate of the known and unknown human experience; it includes elements gathered and forgotten, considered, and cast off, and knowledge that lies dormant until aroused by and for a purpose. The conscious and unconscious are psychological opposites, opined Jung. The conscious operates as the ego, the aware unit, but the unconscious expresses itself in the shadows of dreams, visions, and actions. The conscious is the principal agent in the formation of the persona, which fosters socialization and helps individuals to acclimate to accepted norms. Though expected to be unique individuals, people are expected to meet the unspoken mandate to connect with their societies (Ellens & Rollins, 2004).

The unconscious or shadow develops early in life as the alternative persona to the acquiescing role of the ego (Kincel, 1975). It is the shadow of oneself, which is banished in the process of acclimation, instituted through social learning and discipline. Forsaken undesirable thoughts and behavior reside in the unconscious until the individual acknowledges them. Jung considered the shadow the dark side – active in dreams, imaginations, or negative projections. Kincel (1975) explained that through “confrontation with the unconscious contents and their integration into consciousness,

an individual gradually becomes a more complete expression of his own inner nature and becomes a unique human being” (p. 10). When the conscious is forced to confront itself, the individual’s personality begins to develop and maturity ensues, producing a higher level of self-awareness (Stein, 2021).

Both the persona and shadow exist in the collective, as well as the personal. The persona is what is particular to the individual, but the collective is what is common to humanity (Kincel, 1975). Jung’s psychology also postured that mature males embrace their feminine attributes (Anima), which empower higher levels of sensitivity. On the other hand, females gain power and strength from their masculine side (Animus). Each also may be empowered by their archetypes: the Old Wise Man for men and the Great Mother for women. Men who identify with their archetype exude a high degree of charisma and see themselves (questionably) as gifted leaders. Women influenced by the Great Mother archetype see themselves (speculatively) as nurturers and protectors of humanity, which needs them to survive.

Individuation as a Psycho-Hermeneutic

Religion and psychology are closely connected by their relation to the human psyche. Religious texts are the product of the human psyche and, therefore, bear evidence of human psychological disposition in the depiction of behavior and verbiage (Kille, 2004). Kille (2004) opined that “every step of the way from sacred experiences to the sacred story, every group that gathered, evaluated, and canonized the Bible, and every act of interpretation have involved and been shaped by the human psyche” (p. 31). In hermeneutical study, psychological criticism considers conscious and unconscious factors underlying the communal and/or personal interpretation of a text. It focuses on the content of the expression, understanding that the unconscious is always at work in every text. Not only does the text bear the history of its antecedent but also the collective history evidenced in standard symbols and images, dreams, stories, myths, narratives, and epics. Psycho-hermeneutical inquiry may also consider personalities, religious phenomena, biblical ethics, and the influence of the reader and interpreter (Ellens & Rollins, 2004). A psycho-hermeneutic researcher will consider pathogenic and therapeutic elements in the text represented by language and the systematic presentation of divinity (i.e., Is the presence or will of God revealed or darkened regarding the individual response?).

du Toit et al. (2011) developed and empirically validated a model designed to predict human behavior by associating 10 attributes with three stages of individuation: (a) the containment/nurturing stage, (b) the adapting/adjusting stage, and (c) the centering/integrating stage. In Stage 1, properly nourished individuals develop a strong sense of security and develop enough confidence and self-esteem to challenge boundaries. In Stage 2, they form their ego identities and learn self-sufficiency and

independence. They also learn to balance relationships and to disengage when necessary. Many may also become aware of personal and social imperfections and make determinations about development and tolerance options. This is also the stage where they may become aware of their unconscious or dark side, which leads to a deeper sense of power and purpose. In Stage 3, individuals are more centered and more comfortable with their internal and external environments. Balancing dynamics such as personal and social conflicts comes naturally. They are more reflective and consider their inner thoughts from both sides of their psyche. In this mode, their fulfillment comes in serving others and a purpose outside of their sphere. This creates a healthy internal psychological environment where they accept themselves as they are, aware of what they need to control and/or improve and the decisions that they make regarding either.

The Impact of the Individuation of the Zelophehad's Daughters

The theory of individuation helps researchers to consider an aspect of human growth that is applicable to humanity throughout time. "Whenever a human being is involved with the Bible, in every aspect from its origins to some distant future when it is interpreted for the last time, psychological dynamics of perception, thought, learning, and socialization are at work" (Ellens & Rollins, 2004, p. 5). The models of introspection that examine these positions are based on psychological theories. The du Toit et al. (2011) model of individuation, with its stages and attributes of the process, presents a great tool for exploring the story of the daughters of Zelophehad presented in Numbers 27:1-7.

The Story

Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah, daughters of the deceased Zelophehad (a descendant of Jacob through the line of his 11th son, Joseph), came before the Hebrew court led by Moses and the priest Eleazar to file a complaint. Their father had died without a male heir in the wilderness during Israel's 40-year trek from Egypt to the land promised to the descendants of Abraham in Genesis 17:8. The women explained that their father had not been part of the rebellion led by Korah (Num. 16), whom God had condemned to death. They explained that their father died a natural death and that his son, if he had had one, would be eligible for a share of property in the Promised Land. Zelophehad did, however, have five girls who felt that they should inherit their father's land. "Why should the name of our father be done away from among his family, because he hath no son? Give unto us therefore a possession among the brethren of our father," the women petitioned (*King James Version [KJV]*, 2024, Num. 27:4).

The request surprised Moses because Israeli law had no stipulation for women owning property, inherited or otherwise. Therefore, Moses consulted God, who said, "The daughters of Zelophehad speak right: thou shalt surely give them a possession of an

inheritance among their father's brethren; and thou shalt cause the inheritance of their father to pass unto them" (KJV, 2024, Num. 27:7). The edict became law for all of Israel, with the caveat that women inheriting from their fathers were required to marry within their tribes so that the inherited property would remain with the original family.

Analysis

Looking at the text through a sociorhetorical hermeneutic lens helps to establish the historical, social, and cultural dimensions of the story. The historical location provides for an understanding of the sociocultural positions of the story (Henson et al., 2020). The account of the daughters of Zelophehad firmly occurs in prenational Israel. The women are identified as members of the Hebrew tribe of Manasseh, which historically flourished when Moses led the Israelite people out of Egypt to the land promised their ancestors. The daughters of Zelophehad encounter took place just as the fledgling nation was preparing to leave its wilderness home of 40 years and cross the Jordan into Canaan—the land of promise. During this time, Israel was a patriarchal society, and the role of women was primarily domestic. Women's value was tied to the role of their husbands in society and their ability to give them children, specifically males (Ruth 1:9-14; 1 Sam. 1:6; Prov. 31:23). Property passed from male to male, including widows whose husbands had died before producing an heir. In this case, the widow, under the Levirate law (Deut. 25:5), became the wife of the nearest single male relative (Vos, 1999, p. 104).

Before Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah approached Moses, "women did not constitute autonomous entities before the law in biblical Israel ... As a result, women possessed, for lack of a better term, few if any 'rights'" (Kawashima, 2011, p. 2). The act of Zelophehad's daughters in approaching Moses and his council was unprecedented. It was the first time in Old Testament scripture that a female publicly challenged the governing law (Barker, 1995, p. 228). Their courageous demonstration compelled a just leader to seek a righteous God for the proper recourse, resulting in a change that affected generations. How did these women come to decide to break social norms? What empowered them to confront an assembly of men about a perceived injustice during a time when the concept of women as citizens had not been formed?

Method: du Toit et al.'s (2011) Model of Individuation

Individuation may have been the base of such change as people who become self-aware are willing to break with societal norms to develop socioeconomic independence (Fraser-Thill, 2023). Throughout history, human coexistence has been based on tightly formed interrelated nuclei that provided security and sustenance for its members. Group stability depended on the maintenance of the collective, and breaching norms was discouraged. Yet, as some members became self-aware, confronting their realities and actualities through the process of individuation, they were more willing to confront

and, if necessary, break the boundaries. The individuation model may provide some enlightenment on the experience of Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah Zelophehad.

Table 1 maps the women's behavior to the du Toit et al.'s (2011) model of individuation to chart their demonstration of the phenomena. According to the model, evidence of Stage 1, the containment and nurturing phase, is a high level of confidence and high self-esteem. This is demonstrated by the five women who approached the council of men in front of the entire Israeli assembly. The approach was no feat for mild-mannered or insecure people, for they were sure to have drawn attention first because of their gender and second because of their challenge. Courage requires confidence.

The evidence of the second stage, the adapting/adjusting phase, is the acceptance of the past in an objective and realistic manner. At this stage, individuals demonstrate the ability to break with typical patterns and to face reality. It is the stage in which they accept the flaws of others and the need to create their own happiness. The second stage is also the place where one becomes aware of a greater purpose. Zelophehad's daughters demonstrated this level when they laid out the facts of their father's life and death, his loss, and their rights. They accepted their father's flaws and expected Moses to do the same. Their very voice broke with the societal norm for women and their sense of purpose was demonstrated in their request for justice. They realized that their future depended on their actions.

In Stage 3, centering/integrating, individuated people can handle tension caused by conflicting ideas. Zelophehad's daughters demonstrated the ability to handle tension as the atmosphere their encounter created was undoubtedly very tense since it was not common for women to come to court. They approached an all-male council in a patriarchal society. By doing so, they broke a societal norm, risking rejection by men as well as women. Their actions make them an example of followers who spoke truth to power despite apparent dangers. The actions of these individuated women are a model of courageous followership that their contemporary professionals may emulate and draw strength from.

Table 1: Individuation of Zelophehad’s Daughters

Stage	Evidence	Demonstration
Containment/Nurturing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High level of confidence and high self-esteem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approach male assembly • Broke cultural norm
2. Adapting/ Adjusting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acceptance of the past in an objective and realistic manner • Accept the flaws of others and the need to create their own happiness • Becomes aware of a greater purpose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approached the council, laid out the facts of their father’s life and death, his loss, and their rights • Accepted their father’s flaws and expected Moses to do the same • Voice broke with the societal norm for women • Sense of purpose was demonstrated in their request for justice
3. Centering /Integrating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handle tension caused by conflicting ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approached all-male council in patriarchal society • Broke societal norm • Risked societal rejection

The Need for Courageous Followers

Followers, often referred to as subordinates, reports, and/or associates, help leaders to execute their responsibilities wisely and/or effectively. Yet, people have been conditioned to take a subordinate role to leaders. From childhood, people are taught to submit to authority or to suffer consequences for disobedience. This ideology is reinforced through various societal institutions from schools to religious organizations. Indeed, a verse from a well-known poem advises “We can’t all be captains; we’ve got to

be the crew ... Be the best at whatever you are" (Rainy Day Poems, 2024). As a result, many enter the workforce understanding themselves to be supporting characters whose best contributions are to the lead player. Such social programming tends to feed timidity that may impair the ability to respond appropriately in difficult situations (Chaleff, 2009).

Yukl (2006) noted that followership behavior may be classified in a variety of ways. Individuals who are overwhelmed by workplace challenges may become resigned and unconcerned about progressing. They become apathetic, unable to move beyond the present circumstances, and pay little attention to accomplishing the tasks at hand, which is where they differ from regimented followers. Regimented followers perform their tasks blindly without too much thought and are completely obedient, functioning by rote and requiring much supervision. Leaders may benefit, however, from the passive support of such followers, whose threat potential can be managed, but it will cost them time and energy to ensure positive productivity (Marshall, 2008; Schermerhorn, 1997).

In transactional environments where decisions are made by managers, such attitudes may have been welcome, but as the workplace transitioned to team environments where decision making was conducted by groups, passivity contributed to problems in the quality of decisions. This lack of efficacy was attributed to groupthink, where group members tend to follow a proposed course in the interest of appearing cooperative (Cline, 1990). Cline (1990) explained, "Together the studies suggest that groupthink groups 'attempt to maintain harmony at the expense of critical decision-making" (p. 122). Followers engaged in these groups focus on reaching consensus rather than solving problems.

Then there are the dysfunctional followers who are not concerned about the accomplishments of their peers, leaders, or organizations (Kellerman, 2008; Kelley, 2008). They are there for compensation, unmotivated, and content with the status quo. Their major advantage is that they are dependable as survival is their major objective. Such behavior is symptomatic of leadership failure or a self-focused organizational mission (Treister & Schultz, 1997). However, Treister and Schultz (1997) opined, "followership is not a term of weakness, but the condition that permits leadership to exist and gives it strength" (p. 9). Mature followers are self-confident, share the leadership vision, and promote the organizational mission (Kellerman, 2008; Kelley, 2008). These individuals engage in high leader-member exchange, where they "are able to fill the gaps in the leader's knowledge, experience, intelligence, and planning" (Treister & Schultz, 1997, p. 10). They become an extension of their leaders. Depending on their personalities and motives, they may also be a threat to their superiors. Kellerman (2008) classified such followers as activists and/or diehards, while Kelley (2008) considered them stars (Marshall, 2008).

Chaleff (2009) postulated that followers must enter five dimensions of courage to ensure leadership effectiveness. According to Chaleff's courageous followership model, they must assume responsibility, be willing to serve, challenge as necessary, participate in transformation, and take moral action (pp. 6-8). Followers who assume responsibility are those who acknowledge and embrace their organizational citizenship. They understand their position, assess their opportunities, and take appropriate actions. At the same time, they understand the importance of serving and are eager to take on additional responsibilities, even if someone else receives the credit. They can make tough decisions, support their leader's actions, and be assertive even in uncomfortable situations. "Courageous followers give voice to the discomfort they feel when the behaviors or policies of the leader or group conflict with their sense of what is right" (Chaleff, 2009, p. 7). They value organizational goals above group harmony. Most importantly, they are true to their moral compasses and unafraid to confront injustice. These behaviors typify the model of individuation exemplified by the Zelophehad women.

Discussion

In summary, the psycho-hermeneutic model of individuation presents one answer to the research question, What are the factors that contribute to the formation of exemplary followership? The daughters of Zelophehad, as described in Numbers 27:1-7, demonstrated the stages of individuation in taking an unusual and courageous step for their time. Individuation allows the reader to identify with the biblical characters' experiences as the story unfolds. By doing so, it lifts the characters from the pages as mere images and brings them into view as humans faced with choices like contemporary dilemmas. Looking at the story through this lens reveals that the women faced rejection by the male council, ostracism by their society, and, potentially, detachment from their community. However, because they were aware of their position, had faced their father's failures, and were willing to be separated from their community, they broke cultural norms to approach the public council and demand justice.

Their action required a higher level of psychological awareness and stability to forego societal norms and request their due inheritance. As such, they demonstrated the courageous follower model (see Figure 1) as they took the responsibility of standing for their father's inheritance, challenged leadership, and acted morally resulting in a change that served their community. Because of the daughters of Zelophehad, single Israelite women from that point on were eligible to receive an inheritance if their fathers had no sons. The standing of women was improved in the fledgling nation, which contributed to the nation's ability to flourish. Their action allowed the community to experience peace and prosperity as women gained a new level of security. In addition,

the common good was enhanced as leadership showed that it was open to change, enhancing the virtue of the collective society.

Figure 1

Chaleff's (2009) Courageous Followership as Demonstrated by the Daughters of Zelophehad



Though the action of the daughters of Zelophehads stands as a model for addressing injustice with calm and courage, I would err if I did not laud Moses for receiving the women and taking their request seriously. Had he been a man of a different character, this story may not have made it into the sacred text (except that a gracious God had designed it to be so). In his role, Moses is an example for leaders who care about those whom they lead. Such will demonstrate their concern by their behavior, including listening and acting (Chaleff, 2009; Upshur-Myles, 2007; Yukl, 2006). These are the individuals who empower their followers by expressing appreciation for their efforts, respecting their ideas, and keeping promises made to them. They follow up with employees on issues that are important to the individuals, which shows that they are able communicators. They are open and approachable, always willing to share knowledge with those whom they lead. When leaders behave in such ways, followers are not only empowered but they feel valued. The result is a more highly functional organization as those who follow become more engaged (Bass, 1990; Chaleff, 2009; Yukl, 2006).

Limitations of the Study and Future Directions

Kille (2004) advised that psychoanalytic researchers must be careful not to read into the scriptures what is not there. Osborne (2006) explained that “as readers, we want to place ourselves in front of the text (and allow it to address us) rather than behind us (and force it to go where we want)” (p. 29). To do otherwise is to impose personal assumptions upon the text to fulfill expected meaning. To avoid such bias, the scholar advises that biblical interpreters present the story as relayed by the sacred text. Researchers then consider the period of the story, the culture, and the practices of the time. Then, the researcher may consider the story from the perspective of the reading. Fully recognizing the presence of personal imagination and assumptions, the researcher may use hermeneutical tools to clarify the perception of the inherent events and behaviors.

The behavior of the Zelophehad women easily aligned with the identified attributes (evidence) of individuation as postured by the du Toit et al. (2011) model. What the

story did not reveal was the catalyst of the individuation process. Individuation is considered a natural process that starts with a child's first demonstration of preference (Amsel, 2019). That process, however, is interrupted by parental discipline and direction. What is the catalyst that motivates the introspection that promotes self-discovery leading to self-awareness through the process of individuation? This matter provides an opportunity for further study in psychology.

The story also did not identify the sister who first experienced the separating level of awareness. Since the Bible presents Zelophehad's daughters as a unit, they have been studied as such. There is no way to determine who was the leader or if a less-individuated sister accompanied the group because of her familial attachment. Additionally, because the women could only be observed through this one episode, there was not enough information to identify other individuation behaviors. However, the identified attributes illustrate the application of individuation in the development of strong and courageous followers. Future studies may consider extending this study to build an extensive model of courageous followership that would further build on the du Toit et al. (2011) model.

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Following the Leader? A New Academic Model of Ethical Decision-Making for Christian Followers

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Roundtable: Followership

Abstract

What makes an ethical Christian follower? More importantly, how do Christian followers make better ethical decisions? By delving into followership and Christian ethical theories, a new academic model emerges that should aid in understanding the determinants of ethical Christian followership and the motivators and worldview that produce better ethical decision-making. Utilizing worldview and the expectancy theory of motivation, it is possible to ascertain a typology of ethical Christian followership that corresponds to Kelley's concept but also enhances knowledge around follower decision-making. This model acts as a future guide to teaching and communications surrounding ethical decision-making in the Church by delineating what effective, ethical Christian followership looks like. With increased clarity around what ethical decision-making for Christian followers looks like, it is possible to create intentional training and development programs to promote this functionality in the workplace and other institutions.

Introduction

In 1962, Adolf Eichmann, on trial for war crimes, famously wrote that he and others were "forced to serve as mere instruments" of the Nazis (Barajas, 2016, para. 1). The post-World War II Nuremberg trials shined a harsh spotlight on the concept of followership ethics by inquiring if followers were to be held liable for actions committed under the orders of another. Ultimately, judges, jury, public opinion, and even science repudiated the "just following orders" defense since everyone has a choice – even followers – and thus should be held responsible for their actions. Indeed, it was this question – Could it be that Eichmann and his million accomplices in the Holocaust were just following orders? – that prompted Yale University psychologist Stanley Milgram to produce one of the most famous research studies on obedience ever

conducted. In essence, Milgram found that the results were conclusive: When acting under orders, anyone could conceivably commit a heinous act (McLeod, 2023).

If any follower can act poorly under a leader's influence, then the need for strong ethical followership is more vital than ever. Of course, society rarely notices or applauds followers. Good followers are like the offensive line of a football team; the better they play, the less they are mentioned because their success draws attention instead to the showy players, like the quarterback, running back, or receivers. Conversely,

Good followership ... is the stuff of nearly nothing. Most of the limited research and writing on subordinates has tended to either explain their behavior in the context of leaders' development rather than followers' or mistakenly assume that followers are amorphous, all one and the same. (Kellerman, 2007b, para. 2)

The fact is good leadership depends on good followership. Good followers are those who are consistently able to make effective, ethical decisions despite the changing times and amid a world that is increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA; Baran & Woznyj, 2021). Add Christianity into the mix, and ethical followership takes on a different scope. Christian ethics is as varied and intricate as its secular counterparts, leading to potentially unexplored followership ethical outcomes. By delving into followership and Christian ethical theories, a new academic model emerges that should aid in understanding the determinants of ethical Christian followership and the motivators and worldview that produce better ethical decision-making.

Background and Literature Review

What makes an ethical Christian follower? More importantly, how do Christian followers make better ethical decisions? The answers can be found by examining Kelley's concept of followership and combining it with Christian ethical theory. These theories elucidate the distinctions among Christian followers and the motivations that drive ethical decision-making.

Followership

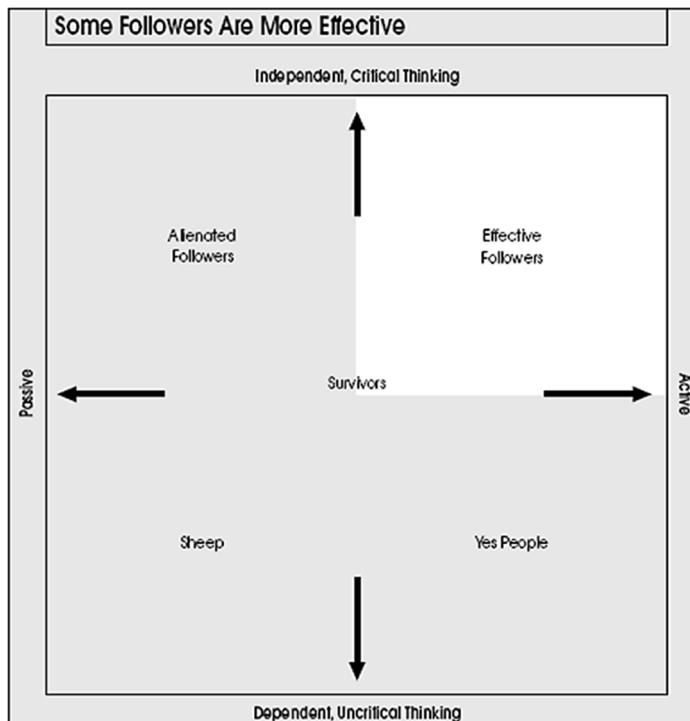
As previously established, the literature and writings about followership are a comparative drop in the bucket to the mountains of information about leadership. However, followership *does* matter, as Kelley (1988) averred, "Without his armies, after all, Napoleon was just a man with grandiose ambitions. Organizations stand or fall partly based on how well their leaders lead, but partly also based on how well their followers follow" (para. 2). Followership – though a newer concept academically – is the hidden driver behind leadership and so deserves a level of recognition.

When defining followership, theorists use a variety of distinctions to combat the common misconception that followers are not individuals but groups. Using rank and behavior, Kellerman (2007a) found that followers typically fall into one of these categories based on their level of engagement – isolates, bystanders, participants, activists, or diehards – and while none of these distinctions is ethical per se, she admitted her bias against people who do nothing when lives are at stake. Kellerman then went on to define followership as “a relationship (rank), between subordinates and superiors, and a response (behavior), of the former to the latter” (p. xx). On the other hand, Chaleff (2009) insisted that *follower* and *subordinate* are not synonymous. He noted that “good” followership is exemplified by courageous behaviors, meaning that followers intentionally commit themselves to serve, challenge, participate, take moral action, speak up, and listen. Chaleff divided followers into four categories, including implementer, resource, individualist, and partner, by using degrees of support and challenge of the leader to subdivide these groups.

Robert Kelley, a recognized leader in the field of followership, also used a matrix to delineate the types of followership styles inherent in any organization. Focusing on follower behaviors, his typology consisted of five groupings: alienated, effective (exemplary or “star”), yes people (conformist), sheep (passive), and survivors (pragmatist) that flow from the two axes of independent thinking and level of activity (see Figure 1). R. E. Kelley (2008) took an idealistic approach to followership, desiring to see followers not only embrace their subordinate position but use it to empower ethical conduct, which he called “courageous conscience,” by whistleblowing effectively, combating groupthink, and promoting institutional integrity (p. 14).

Christian Ethics

Christian ethics is a large and complex field of thought ultimately devoted to the concept that God, not humans, defines what is right and what is wrong (Mortimer, 2013). This objective authority affects how human beings view and react to the world. Indeed, this objective standard forms an essential component of Christian ethics. Unlike secular ethical theories, which rely on subjective measurements of good and evil, Christian ethics depends upon the authority of God and the Bible as distinctive elements. Over the centuries, Christian ethics shifted its emphasis from Aquinas’s natural law belief to Luther’s *Sola Scriptura* view but, according to Gill (2020), Christian ethicists today tend to appeal to the Bible, Christian tradition, Christian experience, or Christian doctrine.

Figure 1: R. Kelley's (1988) Followership Model

Underpinning Christian ethics is the idea that God acts in history and is just. Second only to that is that the “world is good, but is not God,” and third, that humans, though made in the image of God, are fallen and sinful but also redeemed (Fedler, 2006). For Christian ethicists, the problem remains that humans were created to live in community, but sin distorted both the relationships with the Creator and with each other, leading to various theories about how to manage these challenging situations. At its most basic, though, Christian ethics should inform a worldview that changes how people think, act, and respond.

The primary gap in the followership and Christian ethics literature is where the two intersect. There is adequate information about the topics of followership, ethical followership, and Christian ethics, but there are very few particulars regarding ethical Christian followership motivations and behaviors. What drives followers to engage in ethical Christian behaviors and actions? How does that knowledge inform the best way for followers to make better ethical decisions?

Methodology

To answer these questions, it was necessary to compare Christian ethical theory to Kelley's concept of followership to best determine relevant similarities and differences. Utilizing the expectancy theory of motivation and the concept of worldview, it was then possible to ascertain a typology of ethical Christian followership that corresponds to Kelley's concept but also enhances knowledge around follower decision-making. By tying these concepts together, a clearer picture materializes of what constitutes more effective ethical behaviors by Christian followers.

Analysis

Twenty-five years after he wrote his initial article on followership, R. E. Kelley (2008) clarified the thought process behind his typology of followership styles. Instead of asking whether followers were critical thinkers or what level of engagement they were operating at, he posed the following questions: "Are they actively engaged in creating positive energy for the organization? Or is there negative energy or passive involvement?" (p. 7). R. E. Kelley decided it was not enough for a follower to simply be engaged or not, but that they must take a further step and create "positive energy" within their spheres of influence.

Similarly, Christian ethical theory and its adherence to a biblical perspective encourage positive ethical conduct within any institution. Christian ethics holds to the principle of the "infinite worth of the individual" (Mortimer, 2013, p. 17), which is the antidote to negative workplace occurrences, such as incivility, retaliation, and backbiting. Fedler (2006) made the connection that our worship of God and how we treat our neighbor go hand in hand, thus implying that Christians should behave at a higher ethical level at all times. This high standard can aid Christian followers to positively impact others through both their personal and professional lives.

R. E. Kelley (2008) took his thoughts on ethical followership a step further when he noted, "The ability to make ethical and legal judgments, to take proactive steps to promote ethical and legal activities, and then to stand up against unethical and illegal decisions and actions, is a crucial aspect of followership" (p. 15). Christian ethical theory would agree that while Christian followers are primarily called to "live at peace with everyone" (*New International Version*, 1973/2011, Rom. 12:18) and support secular authorities (Rom. 13:1), there may come a time when they must respectfully stand up to immoral or unethical leaders (Acts 5:29). According to these theories, taking moral action is a responsibility of both followers and Christians.

Christian ethics also deals with motivation and intention, while Kelley's followership theory does not. Kelley's typology merely tracks what people *are*, not what they intend

or should be. However, like all typologies, his theory has an aspirational aspect that draws attention to the merits of the effective or star follower. On the other hand, motivation and intention play a significant role in Christian ethics because this type of ethics includes an emphasis on the importance of conduct, character, and goals (Heimbach, 2022). Similar to virtue ethics, where intention is essential to ethical living (Fedler, 2006), Christian ethics hold intentions as highly as ethical actions, as Jesus made clear when He indicated that sinful thoughts are just as wrong as (or worse than) sinful actions (Matt. 5:22, 28).

Proposed Model

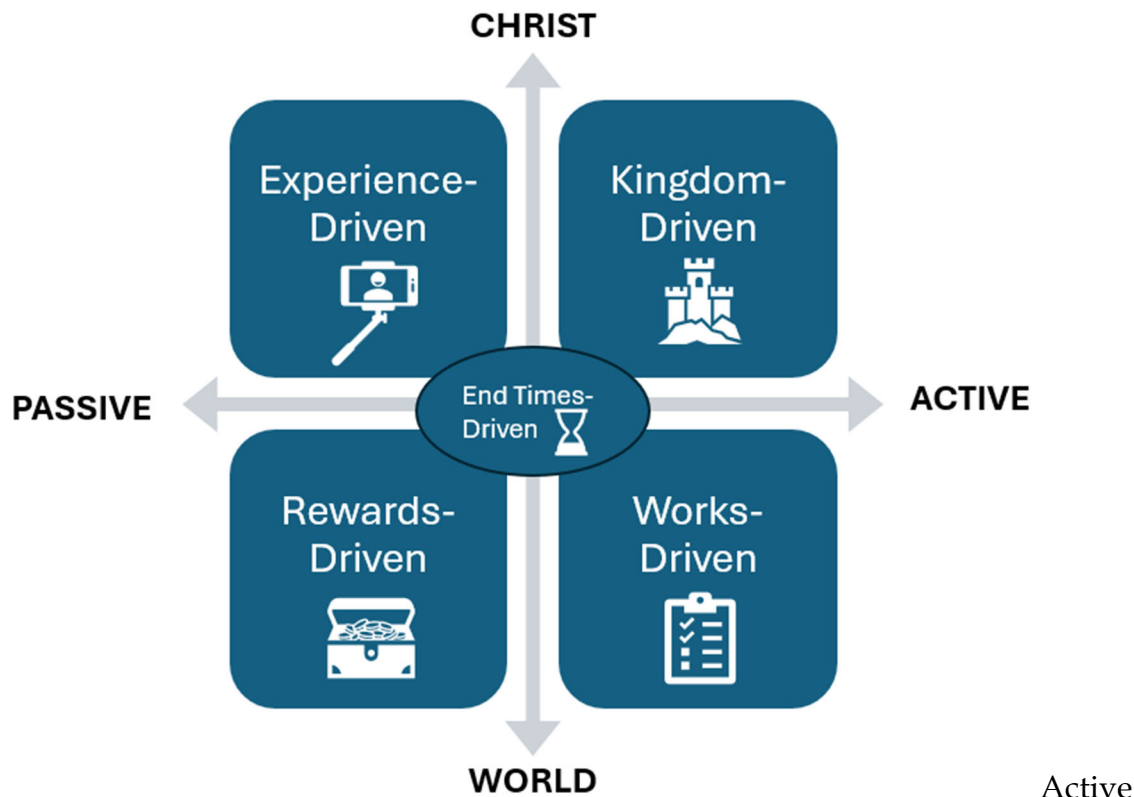
Motivation and intention are crucial in ethical decision making because determining what drives ethical decisions means we are one step closer to understanding ethical choices. This study used Vroom's expectancy theory to explore Christian follower motives. At the risk of oversimplification, expectancy theory is the "belief that an individual chooses their behaviors based on what they believe leads to the most beneficial outcome" (Indeed Editorial Team, 2023, para. 3). In other words, people decide on a course of action based on the potential reward, performance, and outcome. For Christians, these motivators could be rewards, works, the end times, personal experiences, or the Kingdom.

Understanding the motivation behind ethical decisions requires a peek into the concept of worldview. A worldview, according to Ryken and Dockery (2013), is a "well-reasoned framework of beliefs and convictions that helps us see the big picture, giving a true and unified perspective on the meaning of human existence" (p. 14). Grasping worldview is pivotal to frame ethical decision making coherently. For example,

If I envision everyone outside my small circle as hostile competitors in a dog-eat-dog world, I will form my behavior, virtues, and emotions around that belief ...
But if I believe that all persons are made in the image of God, then that faith commitment will shape my actions, feelings, and virtues. (Fedler, 2006, pp. 12-13)

Worldviews have an essential impact on motivation and ethical decision making because, even within Christianity, they may differ.

Thus, in the ethical model of Christian followership (see Figure 2), worldview replaces Kelley's (1988) vertical axis of critical thinking with whether the follower's moral compass tends more toward Christ or the world. Kellerman (2007a) intimated that the only "all-important axis" is the level of engagement, so Kelley's x-axis remains the same in Figure 2. Also, mirroring R. Kelley's typology, this new model includes the five follower "buckets" that align with his effective; alienated; survivor; sheep; and yes, people followership styles.

Figure 2*Ethical Model of Christian Followership*

Christian followers with a more secular worldview tend to make decisions motivated by works or doing good things. According to R. E. Kelley (2008), these followers are positive, active people who get the job done. This group has a lot of output, but their works are not necessarily biblically based, which may skew their ethical responses. They may be content to follow a leader who espouses good deeds but hides the real motivators of action, such as social media likes, public praise, or elevated brand or reputation. An example of this type is Mr. Worldly Wiseman – from the book, *Pilgrim's Progress* – who is greatly esteemed by his neighbors for being generous and moral, but it is all external show (Bunyan, 1678/1979). Christian followers in this bucket cite good deeds and helping people as the motivators of their actions but often confuse real aid with busy work.

With a similar tendency toward a secular worldview, Christian followers who are more passive are more inclined to go for the low-hanging fruit of *rewards* and recognition without the trouble of doing “works.” R. E. Kelley (2008) called this group *sheep* because these followers allow leaders to think for them, and they are typically weak in judgment

and easily led. The rewards of Christianity sway these Christian followers, and so they are apt to follow leaders who espouse get-rich-quick schemes, the prosperity gospel, and name-it-and-claim-it groups. Like Formalist in *Pilgrim's Progress* who jumped over the gate and knew all the outward forms of religion, these followers ethically cut corners and make convenient choices (Bunyan, 1678/1979).

In the dead center of the matrix, R. E. Kelley (2008) indicated that there is a group of survivors or pragmatics who tend to sit on the fence, waiting and watching for events to unfold. These *end-times-driven* Christian followers are content to do as little as or as much as needed while they wait for the Second Coming of Christ to occur. These followers are not out to save the world but to save themselves while watching things burn. An excellent example of this group is Mr. By-ends from *Pilgrim's Progress*; his predilection is for a happy religion, but he also has an uncanny ability to seize any opportunity and turn it into profit (Bunyan, 1678/1979). Ethically, this group of followers is variable because they can easily change allegiances based on potential outcomes, often following leaders who promise safety and security.

It is possible to be passively engaged but still have a Christ-centered worldview. *Experience-driven* followers fall into this category because they rely on “individual feelings, conscience, or love” (Gill, 2020, p. 6) rather than the Bible, tradition, or doctrine. R. E. Kelley (2008) referred to this group as alienated because they may think for themselves but are often critical and loners (though they may see themselves as mavericks). These followers are characterized by their adherence to a personal religion with Jesus, focused exclusively on themselves and their walk with Christ. In *Pilgrim's Progress*, this group would look similar to Mr. Talkative, who speaks wisely and sensibly about Christianity but does very little in the community (Bunyan, 1678/1979). Christian followers of this type will look for leaders who show individual consideration to their constituents.

The Christian followers who are active with a Christ-centered worldview are *Kingdom* driven. This group relies exclusively on the Bible as their moral code and compass to make decisions. R. E. Kelley (2008) found this group to be effective followers due to their ability to show initiative, complete difficult tasks, and offer constructive criticism. Characterized by the follower Faithful in *Pilgrim's Progress* for his faithfulness to God's word unto death, these followers are prone to act according to the dictates of the Scriptures and the Spirit (Bunyan, 1678/1979). That means these followers make more consistent and reasoned ethical decisions due to their obedience to an objective authority. They are likely to actively follow and support their leaders but also have the courage to stand up to unethical practices for the good of their organizations and their leaders. These followers are effective because they are willing to follow the purpose or mission of the organization rather than a specific leader.

Results and Discussion

Typologies, according to Kellerman (2007a), are meant to invite argument because they contain both theoretical and practical applications. A good typology advances academic knowledge by creating distinctions and definitions around esoteric concepts, but it also helps leaders and followers to “translate what they know into what they do” (Kellerman, 2007a, p. 92). While Kellerman acknowledged that typologies are rarely a vehicle for radical change, these models often inspire people to conduct themselves differently than they did before. Thus, while most models are descriptive rather than prescriptive, there is an encouragement to do things differently inherent within any typology due to its primary function of determining the right way versus other ways.

The ethical model of Christian followership, as a typology, aims to not only shed light on an often overlooked academic niche but also provide scope around the motivators affecting ethical decision-making in Christian followers. This model acts as a future guide to teaching and communications around ethical decision-making in the Church and its people by delineating what good ethical Christian followership looks like. Not only that, but this model upholds the ethical necessity of basing decisions on an objective moral code rather than feelings, awards, or deeds. Only by relying on an objective ethical authority can followers make informed, wise decisions regarding complicated ethical daily situations.

Ideally, understanding motivation and worldview can enhance knowledge around ethical decision-making and practice, prompting personal, group, and organizational change. Now that there is more clarity around what effective ethical decision-making for Christian followers looks like, it is possible to create intentional training and development programs to promote this functionality in the workplace and other institutions. Stimulating followers to manage ethical situations better is a noble task every organization should pursue.

Implications for Human Flourishing

Scholarship is relatively silent on the outcomes of follower ethical decision-making and their subsequent ramifications for organizations. This dearth of information could be due to a lack of research on the subject or because the benefits are not easily quantifiable. For example, whistleblowers – who are an acknowledged subset of followers – often find that their ethical decisions produce negative consequences and outcomes for themselves personally. Though there may be greater societal benefits, the individual whistleblower can experience intense persecution, criticism, skepticism, loss of job, or even loss of home/homeland. Nevertheless, making ethical decisions continues to be a follower mandate.

There are real, undeniable benefits to being an ethical follower, which have positive implications for human flourishing. Harvard University's (2024) Human Flourishing Program helped quantify human flourishing by studying and promoting it across disciplines. Based on their results, it is possible to link their human flourishing components directly to the benefits of ethical followership.

- **Happiness and life satisfaction:** Carsten and Uhl-Bien (2013) found that followers who partner with their leaders in a “coproduction of leadership” produce positive organizational outcomes through shared ethical behaviors. For example, they noted that coproduction generates an ethical organizational culture where followers “are more likely to voice ideas and concerns, influence leaders to gain support and resources, and are less likely to see their role as ineffectual or insignificant” (p. 50). Such a culture can positively impact follower life happiness and satisfaction.
- **Mental and physical health:** Authentic followership has implications for better health outcomes. As Johnson (2021) noted,
- Authentic leaders and followers encourage transparency, self-awareness, and moral behavior in each other. Together they build open, healthy relationships and collaborate to achieve worthwhile objectives. Because they feel safe, employees reveal problems rather than creating the impression that everything is fine. (p. 258)
- **Meaning and purpose:** “Courageous conscience” (Kelley, 1992) and “courageous followership” (Chaleff, 2009) are both concepts that promote a sense of meaning and purpose for followers. As Chaleff (2009) stated,
- The rewards of the balanced leader-follower relationship are the rewards of all healthy relationships – honest struggle, growth, mutual admiration, and even love. A reward of the wholesome use of power is the opportunity to witness improvements in the lives of those we serve. When leaders and followers fulfill their respective roles, they give each other the gift of being able to serve well. This service adds meaning to our lives. (p. 235)
- **Character and virtue:** This human flourishing component is exemplified by James Maroosis' (2008) concept of “response-able” followership. This is followership that walks the talk, saying the right things, and doing them the right way. Practicing virtues is essential for ethical followership. “To be virtuous, powerful, and competent consists in large part in knowing what and who to follow and how to lead and comport oneself response-ably in a given situation” (Maroosis, 2008, p. 22).
- **Close societal relationships:** Having close bonds is also a benefit of ethical followership. These benefits are evident in the inherent kindness of what Chaleff called “intelligent disobedience.” Think of guide dogs who are trained to obey but will disobey when their owners are walking into harm's way. “Chaleff notes

that in most cases, obedience is the right option that allows us to benefit from living in communities and organizations” (Johnson, 2021, p. 185). Followers sometimes need to disobey unethical or misguided orders for the greater good of the organization or society.

Limitations and Future Research

While this proposed model effectively addresses the motivators that inspire ethical decision-making in Christian followers, more research is needed to understand the ramifications and accuracy of the claims made. Future research should explore the various components of the model more fully by creating a questionnaire or test that will quantify where individuals fall within the framework. This research can be used in organizational development interventions or ethical decision-making instruction.

Conclusion

Followers – for all of their implied secondary status – bear the onus, along with leaders, to behave ethically and righteously. It is not enough to allow one’s subordinate position to create an ethical *carte blanche*; the follower must also realize their power to affect ethical situations based on their decisions. This concept is more than just ensuring that unethical followership ends but that followers can make informed ethical decisions daily. The proposed ethical model of Christian followership aids ethical decision-making by bringing insight and clarity to Christian follower motivators and worldviews. Kellerman (2007a) concluded her book on followership by asking, “Is something being done? And if something is being done – to what end?” The purpose and intentions behind ethical decisions separate those who merely follow from effective followership. Believing in an objective moral code takes followership from good to great, which can be enhanced by training and developing followers to make that leap.

About the Author

Vanya Starr, SHRM-CP, PHR, is a Human Resources professional in her final year of Regent University’s Doctor of Strategic Leadership and Human Resources Development. She received a Bachelor of Arts in History in 2000, a Master of Arts in Teaching in 2011, and a Juris Master in 2021. Based out of Atlanta, GA, she enjoys working in the software consulting industry with a service-minded orientation providing an integral service of connecting employees and organizations through positive OD interventions. Vanya’s research interests include how to support and develop good employees via a combined focus on followership theory and biblical principles.

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Benefits of Human Resource Professionals in Churches: Ethics for Effective HR Development Programs

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Roundtable: Human Resource Development

Abstract

Human resource development demands professional skills and knowledge – a cornerstone of every church’s growth. This article presents three practical approaches from Zech (2010) for implementing a human resource development program in a church. It offers three actionable recommendations for implementing human resource development in churches: using appropriate methods, employing suitable evaluators, and managing role conflicts. The final section suggests five biblical principles of human resources development ethics, providing a practical guide for church leaders: honesty, respecting others, knowing your yes and no, investing wisely in others, and fairness. This article is valuable for organizations and churches seeking to implement effective human resource strategies. It equips leaders with the knowledge and tools to make strategic decisions for their organization’s leadership development programs, empowering them to foster growth and productivity within their church community.

Keywords: church leadership, lay leadership development, church growth, Christian leadership ethics, ecclesia resource management.

Introduction

Leadership plays a pivotal role in ensuring growth and productivity in a church by preparing the workforce for their assigned tasks (Ivancevich et al., 2018; Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Being ethically sensitive sets a foundation for moral judgment (Jagger, 2011). Thus, when emerging leaders receive practical lessons on ethics, their moral lifestyle can be free of questions. “Becoming an exemplary leader requires fully comprehending the deeply held values, beliefs, standards, ethics, and ideals that drive you. You must freely and honestly choose those principles you will use to guide your decisions and actions” (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p. 48). In essence, the developed leader must have certain traits at the end of the program to lead others in the right direction by

being morally sensitive. “Moral sensitivity is the ability to identify the salient aspects of a moral dilemma” (Jagger, 2011, p. 15).

To integrate leadership and faith, churches must adhere to biblical principles that guide them to remain ethical. The unique approach of incorporating biblical principles in human resource development (HRD) programs is a hallmark of church leadership. Information from the Bible about ethics shows how churches can incorporate these principles in their HRD programs (*Holy Bible: New King James Version*, 1982, Prov. 19:1-6; Matt. 5:33-37, 7:12; Acts 20:35; Lev. 25:14; note that this version of the Bible is used throughout this study). What are the benefits of HRD and human resource professionals in a church? This article presents three approaches from Zech (2010) to discuss implementing an HRD program in a church: using appropriate methods, employing suitable evaluators, and managing role conflicts. The final approach suggests five biblical principles that should be taught in a church’s HRD program as ethical guides for church leaders: honesty, respecting others, making promises carefully, investing wisely in others, and fairness.

Why Human Resource Development?

The distinction between human resources and HRD lies in recruiting resources and improving the resources for organizational growth (Gilley et al., 2002; Swanson, 2001). Per Gilley et al. (2002), employees of an organization form its Human Resources. It is not easy to measure the value of human resources because of the lack of traditional measures and standards. Still, organizational leaders and managers can depend on the cost of replacing valuable employees to determine the importance of human resources (Gilley et al., 2002). The cost relates to the financial burden of developing employees to meet the organization’s needs. “HRD uses interventions like executive coaching, system redesign, team building, training of expertise, action research, and valuing diversity as means to a performance goal, not as a goal in itself” (Swanson, 2001, p. 1).

Zech (2010) encouraged accountability in church leadership with the proposal of performance management that comes in three steps: define, evaluate/communicate, and improve/reward. Zech further suggested three approaches to defining performance: “know what drives the performance of lay ministers, choose useful performance criteria, and determine the level of performance expected” (p. 19). To evaluate and communicate appropriately, Zech gave five guidelines: “use an appropriate method, use appropriate evaluator (s), accept role conflict, avoid evaluation errors, and give useful feedback” (p. 19). Four guidelines to reward people are “work on weaknesses discovered, terminate when necessary, decide if you should integrate the system into a pay philosophy, and reward good performance” (Zech, 2010, p. 19). The following paragraphs shed more light on using appropriate methods, employing suitable evaluators, and managing role conflicts (Zech, 2010).

Using Appropriate Methods

It can be guaranteed that every organization may face some challenges at some point. Still, managers are there to ensure rational decision making (Ivancevich et al., 2018). The adequacy of any organization depends on the aptitudes, resourcefulness, and physical qualities of employees (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2006). How leaders can understand and impact others in a multicultural setting is very crucial due to changing demographics and globalization (Yukl, 2013).

HRD in every organization aims to benefit the organization after investing in employees (Swanson, 2001). Hatcher (2002) elaborated on the values HRD leaders need to set the foundation of corporate social responsibility and ethical dyadic; *ethical dyadic* refers to the ethical relationship between two parties – in this case, the HRD leader and the employee. At a minimum, HRD leaders must be committed to training and learning, have passion and care for the organization, pay attention to quality, be considerate of environmental stakeholder elements, and pay attention to technology and its impact on the organization. The clergy and lay leaders' work-life balance can be managed with HRD strategies to ensure they are not overused at work and do not have time for themselves and their families.

Team building, executive coaching, and system redesign are some examples of HRD interventions (Swanson, 2001). The role of HRD professionals in the church is to work with top management to implement structures. Swanson (2001) contended an HRD program that addresses performance goals can be valuable because it closes every gap. Swanson also emphasized that connecting needs with benefits can see the value of HRD. Thus, "HRD programs are valuable only to the extent that they are connected to specific organizational performance requirements" (Swanson, 2001, p. 19). Where the church identifies a weakness in human resources, that area of need must be controlled with a HRD strategy.

To ensure employee well-being, churches must give special attention to HRD; human resources drives everything in organizations, although the value cannot be directly measured. When employee development tasks are added to pastors who do not necessarily have the skills, the least they can do is provide leadership seminars. HRD professionals can decipher wisdom through expertise and consultation with sources to lead the organization towards a meaningful goal in uncertainties; they can incorporate adult learning into everyday work duties to ease the burden on employees. HRD experts also understand individual differences and can factor in work and family life when strategically planning for the organization.

Employing Suitable Evaluators

Considering the starting point of an employer–employee relationship, effectiveness begins during recruitment. First impressions count so much that leaders must set the right tone (Goldsmith et al., 2012). Recruiters and managers can start new employees with either a good or bad impression of the organization. Goldsmith et al. (2012) wrote,

The talent in your organization will grow and thrive only when you establish a clear set of high standards, display a strong belief that those standards can be achieved, and then demonstrate your actions that you practice what you preach. (p. 109)

Because of individual differences and educational backgrounds, not necessarily level of education but area of study, people differ a lot. To communicate a vision to employees, the employer must begin at a common ground where understanding and interest can be established (Ivancevich et al., 2018). According to Johnson (2020), decision makers require practical wisdom for ethical leadership. Thus, every decision a leader makes impacts the group, not just the leader.

Failure to assign HRD roles to qualified practitioners can be an organization's weakness. Giving HRD roles to non-HRD professionals may be financially beneficial, but that would only harm the organization regarding employee development and well-being. According to Quinn and Strickland (2016), work does not only mean what we do for a paycheck but everything creatures do with God's creation. Argyris (1997) asserted that leaders go beyond fixing organizational problems by questioning the values, beliefs, and assumptions behind what they do (double-loop learning). Leadership identifies, implements, and shares an organization's vision with followers. Thus, an appropriate evaluator may not necessarily mean a paid staff. In a church setting, most workers are volunteers, but because people are volunteering, it does not mean placing them where they do not belong.

Not every procedure will work when challenged by a crisis, and leaders still need to find alternatives (Ivancevich et al., 2018). Ivancevich et al. (2018) emphasized that one component of a judicious decision-making process is preparing for the unexpected; that is how leaders are empowered to accept undesirable results. Sometimes, leaders would have to be out of scope (Stefaniak et al., 2012). Hence, those who make choices for their organizations cannot continuously depend on standard trade processes under pressure and restricted time. Still, Ivancevich et al. (2018) asserted that organizations should not discount the need to set goals to guide leadership decisions. The need to employ HRD professionals in churches is natural because, according to Mohamed and Sathyamoorthy (2014), leaders can make errors by failing to assess essential factors.

Leaders can indulge in toxic decision-making without the needed skills because of members' negative attitudes (Maitlis & Ozcelik, 2004).

Managing Role Conflict

Kitching (2008) emphasized that small organizations, to cut costs, choose to handle HR matters with internal staff who are not HR experts. Failure to assign HRD roles to qualified practitioners can be an organization's weakness. While this may be financially beneficial, it may also harm the organization in employee development and well-being. According to Swamy and Ramesh (2011), managers may face different ambiguous problems and tricky ethical dilemmas when stakeholders increase in diversity, number, and activists. Likewise, Ivancevich et al. (2018) emphasized that managers confront ethical dilemmas because of power and politics. Thus, organizations need leaders who can address employee pressure and burnout.

Alison et al. (2021) asserted that many employees were worried about their health and well-being during COVID-19 because they spent time learning new technologies to complete their work while at the same time having to adjust to changes in work procedures. Selecting qualified practitioners who can strategically design programs to release stress caused by the changing nature of work cannot be discounted. Churches can demonstrate their roles as transformative agents to the world by exhibiting biblical principles like honesty, respect for others, making promises carefully, investing wisely in others, and fairness.

Honesty

The Bible discourages bearing false witness and speaking lies – “A false witness will not go unpunished, and *he who* speaks lies will not escape. Many entreat the favor of the nobility, and every man *is* a friend to one who gives gifts” (Prov. 19:5-6) – but it encourages integrity – “Better is the poor who walks in his integrity than one who is perverse in his lips, and is a fool” (Prov. 19:1). HRD programs should educate leaders to be role models of integrity.

Koshal and Patterson (2008) wrote role modeling means a leader can signal to others what their leader perceives as necessary by becoming the best example in every situation and walking the talk. Additionally, honesty can pertain to how leaders can sacrifice for others. Sacrificing for others means a leader gives time and resources to benefit others, for example, accepting a low salary to serve others (Koshal & Patterson, 2008). Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) asserted servant leaders who take selfless and sacrificial roles attract followers who become psychologically drawn through respect and loyalty. Thus, when those leading are honest, others show interest.

Respecting Others

The act of regarding others confirms what the Bible teaches: “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 7:12). Koshal and Patterson (2008) posited that treating employees with respect means a leader sees and regards everybody as equal and essential, takes time to listen to others (open-door policy), and handles employee correction and criticism in a manner that builds up rather than destroys individuals. Church HRD programs should emphasize the need for leaders to incorporate others in decision making by soliciting input and accepting criticisms from others.

Making Promises Carefully

Matthew 5:33-37 teaches that it is not good to swear falsely; “Again you have heard that it was said to the old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord’” (v. 33). Rather, “let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one” (Matt. 5:37). It entails applying wisdom in making decisions. According to Barbuto and Wheeler (2006), wisdom can be measured by five key elements: awareness of current events, anticipation of consequences, keen perception, staying informed, and foresight. Hence, HRD programs must employ strategies that equip church leaders to apply wisdom.

Investing Wisely in Others

The Bible’s account of the first-century church in the book of Acts recounts how the elders of the church were instructed to take care of the weak; “I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (Acts 20:35). Koshal and Patterson (2008) advised investing in others involves meeting and developing their needs. Thus, organizations must reward people for their services, create a productive working environment, guide workers to identify personal and professional goals and provide training. Stead (2005) argued that the responsive nature of mentoring relationships, combined with additional peer support, effectively addresses leadership needs, cultivates leadership skills, and strengthens networks (p. 182). In discussions related to leadership development, Stead (2005) draws upon the work of prominent scholars like Clutterbuck (2011) and Dey (2001), who suggest that organizations have the potential to nurture widespread leadership through a strategically selective approach to mentoring. Therefore, Church Human Resource Development (HRD) programs should incorporate diverse training methodologies that align with the individual aspirations and professional goals of their members. This comprehensive approach enhances the effectiveness of leadership initiatives and promotes a more inclusive and supportive developmental environment.

Fairness

Leviticus 25:14 underscores the importance of fairness and refraining from exploiting others. Demonstrating fairness involves recognizing and appreciating employees' efforts by implementing supportive measures and systems, using verbal and written communication to acknowledge their contributions, and organizing social gatherings and events for them (Koshal & Patterson, 2008). Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) stated that empathetic leadership encompasses emotional support and guidance. A leader should adeptly navigate challenging situations and setbacks without succumbing to emotional exhaustion. Displaying empathy involves proactively addressing the needs of others, offering support during emotional difficulties, and assisting others in managing their emotions (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006).

Summary

The current text delved into the importance of ethical leadership and HRD within a church context. It emphasized the integration of biblical principles into HRD programs and the role of leaders in fostering organizational growth and productivity. Furthermore, it discussed the distinction between human resources and HRD, underscoring the value of investing in employees for organizational success. The text also explored the approaches and guidelines for implementing a church's HRD program, highlighting appropriate methods, the engagement of suitable evaluators, and the management of role conflicts. Additionally, it touched upon the values and considerations necessary for effective HRD leadership. This article contributes to the existing HRD literature and can benefit churches seeking to implement human resource strategies. However, it is essential to note that strategies for church HRD extend beyond the scope of this article. Therefore, readers and researchers must explore additional literature and biblical references to stay current.

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**Balance Between Engaged and Disengaged:
Being in This World but Not of It** (Title Style)

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Roundtable: Human Resource Development

Abstract

In the spirit of human flourishing, six participants' perceptions of social identity and the role of spirituality and self-transformation within the context of the U.S. culture were examined using Tajfel's (1978) social identity theory. Following Dean and Newton's (2022) resetting and returning to the drawing board method, social identity theory's application in the U.S. culture as a composite of 50 states over the past four decades was examined in relation to reliance on (a) belonging, (b) self-esteem, and (c) pride in establishing and sustaining social identity. The national culture analysis referencing key events from the 1980s, 1990s, and the first and second decades of the new millennium was examined. Since the U.S. culture functions within the global dynamic impacted by technology, the answers to four research questions were expected to provide data to inform whether technology supports sustaining moral traits or is a hindrance. Wreczycki's (2019) working definition of national culture as a repository of values binding citizens as a nation and rights and obligations was referenced to analyze traits and behaviors. Wreczycki's (2021) sustainable social value model was used to examine selfhood sustainability. Jesus' values derived from Matthew 5:3-12 extracted by Winston (2002) and Wreczycki were referenced as a benchmark to assess how participants' traits derived from content and themes compared. Robbins' (1996) sociorhetorical interpretation was used to move toward what it means to balance being engaged and disengaged – to be in this world but not of it. The John 14:27 pericope was analyzed exegetically to explain the concept of self-awareness and self-transformation using Lancaster and Palframan's (2009) position that spirituality plays a noteworthy role in personal growth based on (a) openness to transcendent power, (b) self-acceptance, and (c) elevation above ego's constructs.

Keywords: self-awareness, self-transformation, social identity, spirituality

Five decades ago, Tajfel (1978) published social identity theory grounded in deriving the sense of self-esteem from a group to which a person belongs. This implies that a person's self-concept (Knowles et al., 2015; Wreczycki, 2021) would be subject to group dynamics, which Arrow et al. (2000) defined as (a) internal, (b) external, and (c) contextual. Knowles et al. (2015) referred to self-concept as taking responsibility for one's own decisions and life. Wreczycki (2021) expanded self-concept to encompass the ability to forecast the implications of (a) emotions, (b) feelings, (c) thoughts about emotions and feelings, (d) words spoken and written, and (e) actions taken to create sustainable social value for all.

Literature Review

Half a century has passed since Tajfel (1978) developed social identity theory. During the 1980s of the Reagan administration, face-to-face contacts, landline telephone, printed newspapers, and television were predominant communication mediums (Beschloss, 2007). The 1990s marked the onset of globalization and relocating production lines from the U. S. to lower labor-cost markets and necessitated efficient supply chains to bring finished goods back to the domestic market (Rhode & Toniolo, 2006). In the middle of the decade, slow-speed telephone landline-based Internet and 2G digital cellular telephone arrived. The onset of the new millennium amplified the growing reliance on quickly evolving technology and the potential threats of being disconnected from it due to digital complications (Casani & Wilson, 1996). The second decade of the 21st century marked the election of the first African American president via the use of social media as a substitute communication and connection medium (Obama, 2018).

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory emerged with Tajfel (1978) positing the importance of belonging to a group to derive from it a sense of (a) identity, (b) pride, and (c) self-esteem. Tajfel and Turner (1979) expanded the theory within the context of intergroup dynamics. Additionally, group internal and external conflicts were researched from the perspective of social identity. Stets and Burke (2000) equated social identity with self-awareness. Wreczycki (2021) used self-awareness as the first pillar of the sustainable social value model and a consciousness-based knowledge of selfhood based on conceptual processing of (a) emotions, (b) feelings, and (c) thoughts for emotional maturity.

National Culture, Values and Behaviors

Wreczycki (2019) interpreted national culture as a repository of moral principles, rights, and obligations of citizens and a restraining system to result in moral choices. Hofstede (1983), Williamson (2000), and Duong et al. (2017) defined national culture as (a) artifacts, (b) beliefs, (c) customs, (d) rituals, and (e) rules that govern citizens through national institutions. Yanow (2000) posited that individuals usually do not verbally discuss beliefs and values with others but hope that their behaviors inform others of the underlying moral principles. While Yanow pointed at a relation between beliefs, behaviors, and consequences, Wreczycki emphasized that values (a) stem from beliefs, (b) are repositied in an individual's moral character, (c) inform behavioral outcomes, and (d) carry social consequences.

Sustainable Social Value Model

Wreczycki (2021) proposed that social value can be created, shared, and sustained based on the linear and mutually dependent pillars of (a) self-awareness, (b) emotional maturity, (c) emotional sovereignty, (d) self-concept, (e) deliberate ascent of free will to abide in God, and (f) moral choices informing behavioral outcomes with social consequences. While Konopaske et al. (2017) interpreted self-awareness as consciousness-based knowledge of (a) emotions, (b) feelings, (c) motives, (d) desires, (e) thoughts, and (f) acts that carry social implications, Wreczycki (2021) extrapolated self-awareness to encompass introspection of emotions and feelings to use in the conceptual and rational process of validating the artifacts of self-reflection against values stored in the moral character. While Cherry (2024) referred to self-awareness as the psychological state and the focus of attention, Wreczycki pointed at (a) emotions, (b) feelings, (c) thoughts, (d) words spoken and written, and (e) actions taken as coalescing the state of selfhood. Wreczycki posited that stable emotions as energy in motion are necessary for emotional maturity and sovereignty to lead to self-concept, which Knowles et al. (2015) described as taking responsibility for one's decisions and actions within the social context. Wreczycki went a step further, positing that the ability to assess the social implications of emotionally driven self-awareness while making decisions with social implications serves as a steppingstone to the ascension of free will to abide in God to make moral decisions for sustainable social value.

Self-Transformation

Kemp (2015) proposed that a willful change of the foundational aspect of an individual's motivational structure constitutes a self-determined mind and heart endeavor. Wreczycki and Newton (2023) referred to this phenomenon as operating from the mind-heart axis. However, in cases of radical transformation, Kemp implied

that it happens to a person rather than the person initiating it. This conceptual position suggests that transformational grace is the subtle power behind a personal change.

Spirituality

Sheldrake (2007) posited that spirituality is what defines the current era. Jesus' traits derived from Matthew 5:3-12 point at the origin of the Way before it became known as Christianity. The Latin term *spiritualitas* was derived from the Greek term *pneuma*, depicting the breath of spirit through the flesh. Referencing 1 Corinthians 2:14-15, a spiritual person is one in whom the Spirit of God dwells. According to *Lectio Divina*, the achievement of a spiritual state starts from (a) *Lectio*, which is reading a scriptural verse with comprehension; (b) *Meditatio*, which is thinking about the verse read and applying its content to the reader's life; (c) *Oratio*, which is asking God for transformational grace; and (d) *Contemplatio*, which is dwelling in God's grace in silence allowing the verse to sink in for sustainability (Robertson, 2011).

Underhill (2002) posited that humans are vision-creating beings inspired by aspirations and goals that are beyond physical perfection and an expression of intellectual supremacy over other species that reveal spiritual fulfillment. Sheldrake (2007) proposed that spirituality transcends individualism on behalf of collectivism in everyday life. Wreczycki and Newton (2023) contended that spirituality is expressed through the traits of (a) courage, (b) authenticity, (c) transparency, and (d) self-compassion to be empathic toward others but with emotional and moral boundaries that create sustainable social value for all and serve as an effective modality against excessive individualism expressing itself as narcissism.

Jesus' Values Extracted from Matthew 5:3-12

Wreczycki (2021) qualitatively analyzed Matthew 5:3-12 and extracted values of (a) care, (b) cohesion, (c) commitment, (d) humility, (e) integrity, (f) joy, (g) mercy, (h) perseverance, (i) self-restraint, and (j) social justice. These values are consistent with Winston's (2000) qualitative analysis of the same pericope while referencing humility as effectively managing temptations of the false self. Winston pointed at *agapao* interpreted as moral love reflecting care for others or being "others-centered" (p. 9) – to do what is right at the appropriate time. Wreczycki extended this position in the sustainable social value model to bring the results of self-awareness, emotional maturity, and sovereignty to social context.

Jesus' Traits Within the Contemporary Context

According to Aissel (2005), selfhood as a conglomerate of the ego's expressions emanating the "true nature of a human being" (p. 285) is the representation of personhood and the keeper of autonomy and integrity independent from temptations of

the ego (Maslow, 2006). The ego defines a person as a finite entity (Doron & Parot, 1991). Selfhood emanates the person's whole identity also referred to as the essence (Jung, 2005). Selfhood as a composite of the infinite ego's reflections is endowed with authenticity and objectivity that its individual parts lack when considered separately. In the words of Robert Frost, the ego's reflections dance in a circle and suppose while the self sits in the middle and knows (Huntington, 2005).

Terestchenko (2008) posited that human awareness of selfhood is reflected by the ability to act with consideration for others based on moral principles. Those who are unable to maintain steady awareness of selfhood may succumb to pressures from others in social environments demanding cultural conformity at the expense of preserving individuality and moral responsibility by assuming an inactive role in a social system. Hawkins (2005) proposed that moral principles dwell in a subtle realm of human consciousness. As intelligent species, humans experience honesty in the world as an organizing phenomenon central to the foundation of a civilization even though honesty is not independently present in the external world. True power emanates from self-awareness and consciousness, and what is experienced is a materialization of the subtle. Consciousness is consistent with what the world religious traditions refer to as dwelling in God, and science refers to the implicate order of everything that exists endowed with compassion (Bohm, 1985).

Issler (2012) explained that human beliefs are formed by repetitive thoughts and cannot be changed instantly by a heartfelt commitment of will at any time but can be transformed indirectly over time with God's grace. Issler identified five gaps that prevent humans from following Jesus:

1. The disconnected gap – synonymous with not regularly abiding in Jesus.
2. The distress gap – consistent with moments of emotional stress.
3. The dismissive gap – resistance to the truth.
4. The discrepancy gap – when professed values are not reflected deep in moral character.
5. The distracted gap – emerges due to the lifestyle drifting in the wrong direction.

Issler (2012) emphasized that Gaps 1 and 2 are the foundational ones and prevent humans from recognizing Gaps 3 through 5. Issler recommended four steps that can assist in making progress in the moral character "inner heart formation" or a "heart flow work" (p. 56): (a) awakening to the gaps, (b) admitting their existence with honesty, (c) asking for transformational grace to close them, and (d) acting on transformational grace with courage.

To illustrate Jesus' full spectrum of divinity and humanity, the values extracted from Matthew 5:3-12 were juxtaposed with traits from Luke 22:46 that tested moral character to its core. Since Jesus experienced emotional stress in Gethsemane, the reliance on core beliefs to sustain moral character, which is the source of individual thoughts and actions, must have existed to recover. The affective elements of moral character such as (a) attitudes, (b) desires, (c) disposition, and (d) feelings stem from cognitive elements such as (a) beliefs, (b) imagination, (c) internal dissonance, (d) knowledge, and (e) pre-theoretical aspects. To be divine, one must be extraordinarily human in effectively managing emotions. Issler (2012) posited that emotional stress can disturb the willing and doing axis of the human condition. In Luke 22:46, the trait of anguish, which reflects an extreme emotional stress and sorrow (i.e., a feeling of loss) are referenced as modalities through which a person can confront a trying situation and ask for transformational grace to recover. Emotional turbulence disturbs the sense of inner peace and the balance of the mind-heart axis. Philippians 4:6 encourages prayer for transformational grace to rise above emotional stress to maintain the connection between self-awareness and emotional sovereignty to rely on self-concept to ascend the free will to dwell in God to consider the collective social good before one's own.

Exegetical Analysis

The story of Christ being human and divine provided some points for guiding the research process. According to Sheehan (2008), Christ claimed the following traits: (a) being superior to all that was holy and good, (b) being God Himself, (c) being God the Lawgiver, (d) omnipotence, and (e) being the second person of the Trinity, God the Son. He also acted in a way that showed human traits. For example, John's Gospel states that the historical Christ, God the Son, intentionally became flesh. According to Pederson et al. (2015): "God became incarnate through the power of the Holy Spirit in the flesh of the human Jesus and, likewise, that God continues to become incarnate in our flesh and in the messy details of our lives" (p. 172). In other words, Christ revealed his humanity through the human act of biological birth. These themes appeared in an inner-repetitive texture analysis of the Gospels.

Inner Texture

Robbins (1996) stated that "inner texture concerns relationships among word-phrases and narrational patterns that produce argumentative and aesthetic patterns in texts" (p. 46). Word-phrases provide insights into an author's intended meanings regarding relationships between key phrases. Repetitive inner texture indicates an author's intention to emphasize key points that reveal a phenomenon about a (a) person, (b) place, (c) object, or (d) thing. For example, John began his Gospel by repeating the beginning of Genesis in his first chapter.

Another human aspect of Christ pertained to having a biological mother. Hahn (1999) wrote that Christ became man through a virgin birth that led to the veneration of Mary for all generations as recorded in Luke 1. In other words, although Christ possessed the divine traits, He entered the human world through human processes. Furthermore, Christ experienced the suffering associated

with human life. In the Gospels, He expressed sorrow and torturous pain during His moments of loss, abandonment, and physical affliction. The narratives repeated the emphasis on His pain caused by the crucifixion and scourging.

Human Flourishing as Redemptive

According to the Board of Trustees (2024) at North Greenville University, the following explanation provided the best explanation of human flourishing based on the Gospel message of the combination of humanity and divinity:

The biblical vision of human flourishing is redemptive. God's mission is to advance his kingdom and redeem the entire created order through the saving work of Jesus Christ. He calls all Christians to participate in his mission by using their gifts, talents, and opportunities to draw the spiritually lost to the kingdom through gospel proclamation, to serve other people through acts of mercy and justice, and to glorify him through everyday faithfulness in every sphere of life. In fulfilling this calling, we obey the original Creation Mandate, the ongoing Great Commandment, and the renewed Great Commission, we bless those around us (even unbelievers), and our actions bear eternal fruit that will continue into the new creation.

This set of statements supports the ideas behind Issler's (2012) five gaps. The disconnected gap emphasized the idea that those who do not follow the teachings of Christ allow themselves to experience suffering caused by evil or error. For example, cognitive distortion can occur when someone develops a Christological image connected to the failures of family systems or childhood experiences. This person then continues to reject the belief that an all-good deity exists. The distress gap follows when the person experiences moments of emotional distress and questions the character or divine love of God. By experiencing the combination of emotional stress, doubt, and disconnection, the sufferer dismisses the truth of God's character and begins to diminish the perceived credibility of professed values associated with Judeo-Christianity. Others may perceive the sufferer as having a questionable moral character because the espoused values mismatch the sufferer's actions. As a result, the sufferer's lifestyle can begin to drift into secularism and direct or latent anger directed toward Christ.

The risk of gap-related drifting underlined the need to examine one's attitudes, opinions, and values associated with human constructs of good citizenship versus divine citizenship. Some constructs of secular citizenship pertain to compliance with organizational or societal norms regardless of their origins. In secular worldviews, values tend to be treated as morally relative and changeable over time. However, divine values contain universal applicability and sacred connections to higher callings that impact the afterlife. For example, one's career could be viewed as merely transactional and instrumental for income and status. However, divine worldviews emphasize the idea of vocation regarding work. Veith (2002) stated the following comments:

Those in any line of work are usually doing it not from some high ideal but because they must make a living. Work often appears meaningless. It is a means to an end – survival,

but we survive only to work. It consumes our time, our emotions, our after-hours preoccupations (p. 15).

The sacredness of one's work supports the concept of vocation (Berg & Sadler, 2021). It eliminates the diminishment of one's work to mere instrumentality and uplifts the person by influencing his or her self-perception through a spiritual lens rooted in God's redemptive purposes. Dunlop (2021) noted that people who perceived their stories of suffering through redemptive lenses found a vocational meaning in their work. Mclean et al. (2020) stated that redemption occurs "when a challenging, negative, or traumatic experience is narrated in a way that communicates growth, meaning-made, or resolution" (p. 1).

The 1980s

Beschloss (2007) depicted the 1980s as the Reagan Administration era. The period was characterized by the predominance of face-to-face contacts, landline telephones, personal door-to-door delivery of printed newspapers, mail delivered by the U.S. Postal Service, and local and cable television; this era also revealed noteworthy political and global changes such as the culmination of the Cold War leading to the collapse of the Eastern Bloc in Europe in 1989 (Kramer, 2003; Reagan & Novak, 1989).

The Globalization of the 1990s

The 1990s under the Clinton Administration between 1993 and 2001 experienced the onset of globalization, which relocated domestic production lines to lower labor cost markets creating a global economy (Brinkley, 1997). The need to develop efficient supply chains to transport finished goods back to the domestic market evolved as a result (Rhode & Toniolo, 2006). Additionally, the middle of the decade marked the launch of email, slow-speed telephone landline-based Internet, and 2G digital cellular telephone.

The New Millennium

The onset of the new millennium coincided with the election of George W. Bush as a two-term president between 2001-2009 after a controversial legal battle with the opponent Al Gore (Beschloss, 2007). This decade amplified the growing reliance on quickly evolving technology and digitization. This technological evolution revealed the potential threats of being disconnected from the World Wide Web due to digital complications such as power grid challenges, Internet outages, and cybercrime (Casani & Wilson, 1996). The emergence of the Google search engine revolutionized Internet searches from the standpoint of speed and the number of results returned (Brophy & Bawden, 2005).

The Second Decade of the New Millenium

The second decade of the 21st century was the unprecedented time of the election of the first African American two-term President Barack Obama whose administration constructively influenced the American sociopolitical sphere between 2009 and 2017 (Obama, 2018). The use of social media as a substitute connection, communication medium, and social influencing were employed during the 2008 election and 2012 reelection campaigns. The growing reliance on technology and digitization increased the speed of life and stress. Social media redefined the meaning of friendship. In 2016, a one-term President Donald Trump was elected to serve between 2017 through 2020. Based on Wreczycki's (2021) qualitative analysis of his inaugural speech in comparison with the Save America Rally on January 6, 2021, the presidency marked a challenge to moral values.

Qualitative Research Questions

The literature review provided a working definition for (a) self-awareness, (b) social identity, (c) spirituality, and (d) self-transformation. First Corinthians 14:1 was referenced as a guide on how to develop spiritually. John 14:27 was used as a modality to share spirituality in social environments. The literature review informs and guides the qualitative research questions:

- RQ1: Since Tajfel (1978) grounded social identity theory in belonging to a group as a source of (a) identity, (b) pride, and (c) self-esteem, do you find it applicable in the U.S. culture 45 years later? If so, why? If not, why not? What does social identity mean to you, and has your view changed? If so, what caused your view to change?
- RQ2: Since Wreczycki's (2021) sustainable social value model grounded in (a) self-awareness, (b) emotional maturity, (c) emotional sovereignty, (d) self-concept, and (e) ascension of will to make moral choices supports personal autonomy to remain moral, how can a person balance this responsibility with group membership since the group depends on its leader and followers for value sustainability? Since the pillars are linear and self-awareness is necessary to balance emotions to rely on self-concept for moral choices, how do you insulate yourself from the potential impact of group dynamics to remain yourself?
- RQ3: What does spirituality mean to you within the context of your religious tradition or philosophy if you are not affiliated? If you are affiliated, how do you sustain unity with your deity to interact with others from the inspired perspective? If you are not affiliated, how do you sustain inner peace to interact with others (Gajda & Gajda, 2012)?
- RQ4: Wreczycki (2019) defined national culture as a repository of values, rights, and obligations of citizens and posited that individuals are responsible for sustaining their values and interacting with the culture, which binds a nation through national institutions. Given the technological advancements impact interactions,

how do you contribute to national cohesion while insulating yourself from the group dynamics for selfhood sustainability?

Methodology

Qualitative Methods and Analysis

Liamputtong and Ezzy's (2005) qualitative analysis method was used to facilitate immersion in the content for themes to emerge to be translated into codes representing underlying traits infused with (a) emotions, (b) feelings, (c) thoughts, (d) words, and (e) actions with social implications. Qualitative data are presented from six participants split between three males and three females with themes and codes representing traits. Data collection involved semi structured interviews and written responses to four questions distributed via email. The researchers transcribed the narrative responses into Word format for coding to occur. To derive meaning from the data, Saldana's (2009) *in vivo* coding method was used to interpret the data from an exploratory perspective. The study required an openness to participants' perspectives that would allow their ideas and thoughts to emerge from their statements rather than the researchers imposing interpretative biases linked to theoretical preferences that supported other types of coding.

Exegetical Methods and Analysis

To capture a biblical understanding of the chosen pericopes, Robbins' (1996) concept of inner texture supported the exploration of the "communication transaction," which a text supplies through "the implied author, the narrator, and the characters who work together to communicate that message" (p. 28). The exploratory nature of the qualitative study needed a consistent openness in the exegetical analysis so that meaning could be derived from multiple angles without limitations created by other sociorhetorical methods. In John 17:24, the narrator John witnessed Jesus Christ addressing God before the betrayal and crucifixion. Christ used a prayer involving promises and statements that affected the eternal future of the disciples, a particular future that promised eternal placement with Christ and a transformation of moral character in the present life. The transformation involved (a) full acceptance of grace, (b) Christ as being God, and (c) inner peace that could only take place with God inspiring the transformation rather than it being sourced from internal processes of the disciples.

Results

Six participants – three males and three females – contributed content answered four research questions. The content was analyzed qualitatively to extract themes. Themes were converted to one- or two-word traits to compare them to Jesus' characteristics extracted from Matthew 5:3-12.

Participant 1

Participant 1 is a 65-year-old male of Polish origin residing in the Midwest for 40 years. He is an attorney, entrepreneur, father of four adult children, and a practicing Catholic.

Table 1: *Participant 1: Content, Themes, and Codes*

Content	Themes	Codes
I am not familiar with Tajfel’s social identity theory. I do not negate the impact of group membership. However, I believe that belonging to a group should never occur at the cost of individuality. For instance, I was born in the Eastern Bloc Poland. So, I am Polish. I have lived in the U.S. for the past 38 years and am a naturalized American. I speak English, Polish, Russian, and Ukrainian. In my line of work, people visit me in my office, and I visit people in prisons. So, my social identity depends on what I do at any moment and what I think about myself when I interact with others. There are core roles I fulfill like being the son of my late parents living their values that merged with my traits. I am a brother, a father to four adult children, an attorney, and a partner in a law firm. If I am to mention my core values, courage to be patient to control my emotions so they do not control me comes first. What others think of me is not my business. Do my roles define me? Only to the extent of	Balanced group membership with being social but emphasized the value of individuality in human dynamics regardless of how many groups a person belongs to. Provided a broad spectrum of social identity given the country of origin, destination country, the languages spoken, profession as a source of income, and social roles.	Care Cohesion Courage Humility Individuality Integrity Mercy Patience Perseverance Self-respect Self-restraint Social justice Unity Vigilance

Content	Themes	Codes
<p>my thinking about them. Am I proud of at least some of them? Of course. How could I not be? Am I my Juris Doctor degree? No, a degree is merely the means to be a credentialed professional with a license to practice immigration law federally and other branches of law in two states. In my view, a sense of social identity is complex and depends on an individual. I immigrated to the U.S. with a law degree from the best Polish university. I could not use it because I did not speak English. I went to law school here to learn the American law and pass bar exams in two states. So, at one point I was a non-English-speaking documented migrant earning a minimum wage and attending law school. That identity is still part of me regardless of whether people I interact with today know my personal history. That social identity shaped who I am today. What changed were my roles. What has not changed are the traits that are not just my parents' values.</p>		
<p>I agree with Wreczycki's sustainable social value model and the linear nature of its five pillars. With courage, I sustain self-awareness and patiently control my emotions to be able</p>	<p>Agreed with Wreczycki's sustainable social value model. Emphasized the role of courage to be self-aware and to be in control of emotions. Expressed</p>	<p>Authenticity Courage Humility</p>

Content	Themes	Codes
<p>to ascend into my highest instincts to make moral choices with value-adding characteristics. I use humility and patience to not fall into the trap of self-aggrandizement to be my integrated self. The question what Jesus would do is on my mind often. Even when I am in the court room and have the same level of education as the presiding judge, I listen to all arguments carefully and stay silent when receiving instructions. This teaches me how to better help my clients in the future. To be independent of the opinions of others is in my view the greatest spiritual gift.</p>	<p>humility, asking what Jesus would do. Warned of the danger of self-aggrandizement when one falls for the opinions of others, which can be flattery intended for lower purposes. Emphasized being emotionally sovereign from the opinions of others as a spiritual gift to the self.</p>	<p>Integrity Morality Others-centered Patience Self-awareness Self-restraint Service Spirituality Wisdom</p>
<p>I practice the Catholic religion differently from my parents. I have a strong relationship with the Catholic tradition and recognize all the religious holidays that are important to me. I am not able to ignore them. They are grounded in my faith. They are also grounded in my inner and personal feelings. These are not necessarily intellectual experiences. Spirituality is an internal force that enables me to penetrate all concepts, stereotypes, and even mystical propositions to identify my position and feelings and compare them with the existing concepts of my own</p>	<p>Religious and spiritual. Prioritizes the religious holidays as faith foundation. Relies on religious tenets and symbols for processing feelings that stem from emotions. Uses spirituality as an overarching power to connect emotional, psychological, and physical aspects with integrity. Perceives, feels, and uses spirituality as a transcendence vehicle to introspect, self-reflect, and connect the material with the subtle. Emphasizes</p>	<p>Care Cohesion Humility Integrity Joy Mercy Perseverance Self-restraint Self-transformation Social justice</p>

Content	Themes	Codes
<p>understanding of supernatural forces in religious and secular contexts. For me, spirituality is periodically recurring moments of reflection on being using the religious and secular aspects. In the word, dwelling in silence with God, within the context of reasoning, meditation, and perspective, I find much in common with the Jehovah’s Witness tradition. In my dialogue with God, I do not need an intermediary like a priest. For some, the presence of this intermediary is important to continue the tradition, and for some not. For me, the presence of a priest matters but only when I align with him on values. I do not appreciate a money-oriented priest. A value-based priest is a spiritual shepherd who follows Christ and leads others. The communion with God has a positive effect on all relationships with people and the environment. A nervous person finds a moment of reflection and time to be balanced. Therefore, everything should take place in communion with God because intimacy with God allows us to move away from our feelings and focus on relationships with others through communion with God as a constructive approach to life, finding time</p>	<p>religious practice as different from the ancestral approach to encompass all steps of <i>Lectio Divina</i>. Brings results of communion with God to social environments. Considers communion with God as transcendent and restorative to practice emotional self-constraint to result in emotional sovereignty and rely on self-concept for free will ascension to make moral decisions for sustainable social value. Relies on communion with God as a modality to practice <i>agapao</i> which results in doing what is right at the appropriate time for sustainable value adding reasons. Perceives God as a morally loving parent who gives children free will to form their moral character based on ancestral values to ascend to make moral choices that result in constructive social consequences.</p>	<p>Transcendance</p>

Content	Themes	Codes
<p>for others, empathy, and developing our personality and character. Self-work is a life-long process. Unity with God is a leading element of self-work to bring the best self forward originating from the highest instincts to all relationships starting from God and moving to others and our environment. This is what God expects of us. God created the world, but God is not a dictator and does not make us do anything. God gave us free will to make choices. Reflection must be profound for these choices to be right to add sustainable value to the human family.</p>		
<p>U.S. culture is abstract given the diversified states and cultural heritage of their inhabitants. For me, being a patriot is not just waving the flag but always putting the nation first. I assist migrants on the path to citizenship. I work a lot and do not have many interactions in settings outside of the office, courtrooms, and prisons. I use technology responsibly but prefer a paper calendar to keep my appointments. When I have free time, I watch hockey, fish, or listen to the birds. I know who I am and can detect the intentions of others. I value emotionally stable people and keep the emotionally unstable</p>	<p>Pointed at the abstract nature of U.S. culture. Defined patriotism as placing the nation first before personal interests. Amplified being others-centered in assisting them in realizing their American dream. Tends to overwork and values time outside of work. Prefers spending time in nature enjoying hobbies or watching hockey. Is self-assured through introspection and emotional control.</p>	<p>Care Courage Humility Others-centered Patriotism Self-care Selflessness</p>

Content	Themes	Codes
<p>ones away. Avoiding drama is important for the quality of life. By living a meaningful life, I contribute to national meaning.</p>		

Research Question 1

The participant agreed with group dynamics emphasizing that the group membership should not alter personal values. The participant disclosed not being familiar with Tajfel’s (1978) social identity theory not challenging group membership’s importance in shaping social identity but emphasizing the role of individuality as self-perception through introspection with courage to be patient and maintain emotional control for emotional sovereignty. The participant revealed the traits of (a) care, (b) cohesion, (c) courage, (d) humility, (e) individuality, (f) integrity, (g) mercy, (h) patience, (i) perseverance, (j) self-respect, (k) self-restraint, (l) social justice, (m) unity, and (n) vigilance. The participant pointed at the cumulative nature of social identity acquired through the previous roles stamped in the subconscious and grounded in moral character to be referenced.

Research Question 2

The participant agreed with the pillars and linearity of Wreczycki’s (2021) sustainable social value model. The participant revealed the traits of (a) authenticity, (b) courage, (c) humility, (d) integrity, (e) morality, (f) others-centeredness, (g) patience, (h) self-awareness, (i) self-restraint, (j) service, and (k) spirituality. Courage and patience to be self-aware through introspection to be in emotional control allowed the participant to suspend his concepts to produce the best and mutually satisfying solutions while in service to others. The participant referenced what Jesus would do – rely on (a) courage, (b) patience, and (c) wisdom – to operationalize his and others’ best interest in a group setting.

Research Question 3

The participant’s content, translated to themes, revealed traits such as (a) care, (b) cohesion, (c) humility, (d) integrity, (e) joy, (f) mercy, (g) perseverance, (h) self-restraint, (i) self-transformation, (j) social justice, and (k) transcendence. The participant emphasized the importance of religious holidays and the reliance on religious tenets and symbols as an expression of spirituality.

The participant’s traits overlapped with Jesus’ values extracted from Matthew 5:3-12. This finding aligns with the participant’s disclosure of using *Lectio Divina* as a transcendence and self-transformation modality to balance the emotional, psychological, and physical demands of

daily living with the need for restoration to be able to sustain moral character to live a decent life of meaning while creating and sharing sustainable social value. The participant’s traits support the linearity and dependence on Wreczycki’s (2021) sustainable social value model. The participant’s disclosure of introspecting and self-reflecting on the emotional states while modulating feelings with self-awareness supports the need for emotional control with self-awareness and self-constraint to sustain emotional sovereignty.

Research Question 4

The participant revealed the traits of (a) care, (b) courage, (c) humility, (d) others-centeredness, (e) patriotism, (f) patience, and (g) selflessness. The participant is an introspective and self-reflective individual focused on service to others while sustaining moral values. Through humility, the participant revealed caring for the nation by living a life of purpose and meaning.

Participant 2

Participant 2 is a 57-year-old female residing in New England. She is self-employed and identified as not affiliated with a religious tradition.

Table 2: *Participant 2: Content, Themes, and Codes*

Content	Themes	Codes
I must start by saying I have not studied Tajfel’s social identity theory, but I do understand how we are now identifying <i>belonging</i> in the United States today. The concept of belonging has become a cultural buzzword and is used to explain what feels like the fracturing of established societies worldwide. I believe there has always been a conflicting view of those who choose to be loners, or at least outside of the general fold of belonging. “He was always a loner” is an often-used expression after shocking and violent acts. Narcissists,	<p>Interpreted belonging as a buzzword often misused to reflect fractured groups. Focused on solitude and introspection. Warned of the danger of stereotyping.</p> <p>Warned against narcissism.</p> <p>Pointed at the opposite ends of the human condition – a loner and an influencer – perceiving both as dangerous.</p> <p>Perceived as a well-functioning society is an evolving phenomenon working toward unity and tolerance. Emphasized the</p>	<p>Care</p> <p>Cohesion</p> <p>Compassion</p> <p>Consideration</p> <p>Courage</p> <p>Egalitarianism</p> <p>Humility</p> <p>Integrity</p> <p>Introspection</p> <p>Reflection</p> <p>Self-transformation</p>

Content	Themes	Codes
<p>and I mean a clinical version of this maladaptive personality disorder, are that dangerous two-sided coin of loner and influencer. Their power is so often derived from their ability to impact self-esteem, pride, and identity. As we are seeing right at this moment in American politics, this ability to influence and control is, as has always been true, incredibly dangerous. Our definition of society has not evolved into people feeling more connected to all people and species on Earth. Not that it ever has been. I would have hoped that science and humanity would have evolved alongside one another, but there appears to be an almost inexplicable aspect of human nature that seeks conflict and a need to see some humans as <i>others</i>. It has reached a breaking point in our country today. Pride is not something to scream about, your side winning at all costs is not winning at all. We hear the word <i>factions</i> to describe the evolution of social identity, extremists breaking from a group that once was their source of identity, pride, and self-esteem.</p>	<p>need to focus on unity to minimize divisions and conflict. Pointed at pride as a misleading trait to be offset with humility to be egalitarian. Emphasized the need to sustain moral values as a social cohesion modality without overreliance on deriving the sense of belonging, self-esteem, and pride from groups.</p>	<p>Social Justice Solitude Vigilance</p>
<p>But I do not think this is different from 45 years ago.</p>		

Content	Themes	Codes
<p>Throughout history, there have always been violent conflicts, persecution, and inexplicable hatred of people just because they are perceived as <i>others</i>. It feels dangerous today because we know where history tells us we are heading. We have forgotten the basic principle that we all do better when we all do better.</p>		
<p>What a great question. It would be so great if there were indeed a universal moral code that all humans agreed to and followed. If we as individuals could regulate our own words and actions to hold our own selves accountable and redirect, apologize, embrace humility when we misstep what a beautiful world this would be! First, we would need to establish that we are a worldwide society. That kindness and truth, living with having enough and rejecting excess and greed are the foundation of harmony. That we must do our best to do no harm. I do not think this is what we are being taught. I do not think this is what we are encouraged to strive for, but instead to have more of everything even when so many do not have enough. Second, culturally we are not being raised and nurtured to look up</p>	<p>Emphasized the need for emotional and psychological self-regulation for personal accountability. Pointed at the need to forgive and to extend an apology. Pointed at care, harmony, kindness, and truth and social cohesion values.</p> <p>Commented on overreliance on technology at the expense of face-to-face relationships.</p> <p>Pointed at balance and responsibility as the cornerstones of a well-functioning society.</p>	<p>Accountability</p> <p>Balance</p> <p>Care</p> <p>Courage</p> <p>Forgiveness</p> <p>Harmony</p> <p>Hope</p> <p>Humility</p> <p>Kindness</p> <p>Mercy</p> <p>Responsibility</p> <p>Self-restraint</p> <p>Service</p> <p>Truth</p>

Content	Themes	Codes
<p>from our devices and see how we fit gently into the world. If we are to follow our leaders, as the question asks, while at the same time being true to our own moral center, we will need to rebuild society with hope instead of fear. To always be in reaction is to have no chance to find balance. That said, personal responsibility is, I believe, the cornerstone of society. We must first be the best version of our own selves. The opposite of the trending of today's world societies moral direction may well be embracing Service as a principle we could all prioritize.</p>		
<p>A bold assumption any of us have inner peace! For me, it is the Yamas and Niyamas that are my guiding principles. Nonviolence, truthfulness, not stealing, no excess, no possessiveness. Purity, contentment, self-disciple, self-study, surrender. I start my day in reflection of these guiding principles and do my best to look at my own choices to see if I am on the right path. When I am embodying all or some of these wisdoms, I am in balance. I am still searching for my highest self!</p>	<p>Participant pointed at self-awareness as paramount to achieve inner peace. Reflecting on one's emotions though guiding principles is self-work. Through humility, the participant revealed being on a journey of self-discovery.</p>	<p>Courage Humility Peace Self-awareness Self-development Self-discovery</p>

Content	Themes	Codes
<p>The Internet has certainly hijacked civil discourse and exchanges with those whose perspectives differ from my own. For me, being an active volunteer in different schools and organizations has been a significant part of my life since I was a child. Volunteering in organizations within my community has been a value my parents instilled, and it is still an important part of my life. I find this to be the most impactful way for me to live in this world. I learn how others live, and they learn the same about me. This, at least I hope, makes it much harder for people to be likely to vote for things they know would cause me harm. Knowing more about how others live, whether by choice or circumstance, makes us all less judgmental and kinder.</p> <p>If I insulate myself from <i>group dynamics</i>, this may simply be that I have turned away from the noise and the circus that is a nonstop barrage of ugliness. I do not need to hear the daily rants to understand how many people have been led to believe some extremely dangerous things. I am not a participant of social media; I get my news from my hometown paper</p>	<p>Concerned with the use of the Internet as not always having a constructive influence on human affairs. Emphasized social service as a path to inner peace and fulfillment in changing times. Amplified expanding knowledge about others as means of connecting.</p>	<p>Care</p> <p>Charity</p> <p>Consideration</p> <p>Courage</p> <p>Fulfilment</p> <p>Harmony</p> <p>Knowledge</p> <p>No Judgement</p> <p>Peace</p>

Content	Themes	Codes
<p>[<i>New York Times</i>] and listen to NPR for news.</p> <p>I do not know what could happen to have my values shift. I hope nothing unless it shifts me towards greater kindness.</p>		

Research Question 1

The participant expressed concern for group dynamics given the impact of technology, narcissism, and politics. The participant's traits of (a) care, (b) cohesion, (c) compassion, (d) consideration, (e) courage, (f) egalitarianism, (g) humility, (h) integrity, (i) introspection, (j) reflection, (k) self-transformation, (l) social justice, (m) solitude, and (n) vigilance contributed to the expression of concern for fractured groups. The participant emphasized the importance of introspection to shield from stereotyping. The participant discussed the opposite personalities – a loner and a social influencer – as emotionally challenging and sometimes dangerous. The participant pointed at the value of each person's contributions to a well-functioning society to foster unity and tolerance for diversity. The contributions can be maximized by sustaining and practicing values.

Research Question 2

The participant revealed the traits of (a) accountability, (b) balance, (c) care, (d) courage, (e) forgiveness, (f) harmony, (g) hope, (h) humility, (i) kindness, (j) mercy, (k) responsibility, (l) self-restraint, (m) service, and (n) truth. Although the participant did not expressly state an agreement or disagreement with Wreczycki's (2021) sustainable social value model and the linearity of its pillars, the alignment of traits revealed self-awareness and emotional control with vigilance.

Research Question 3

The participant revealed the traits of (a) courage, (b) humility, (c) peace, (d) self-awareness, (e) self-development, and (f) self-discovery. As a person not affiliated with any religious tradition, the participant equated spirituality with inner peace and the belief that all should experience it. The participant pointed at self-awareness as critical to the achievement and sustainability of inner peace to bring peace to the world. Through humility, the participant expressed being on a journey of self-discovery in search of the highest self.

Research Question 4

The participant revealed the traits of (a) care, (b) charity, (c) consideration, (d) courage, (e) fulfillment, (f) harmony, (g) knowledge, (h) no judgement, and (i) peace, expressing concern for a well-functioning national culture focused on value sustainability to promote appreciation for diversity and tolerance. The participant was concerned with overreliance on technology in contracts in the era of growing narcissism and sociopolitical divide. The participant pointed at charitable work and social knowledge sharing as solutions to sustain a well-functioning nation.

Participant 3

Participant 3 is a 52-year-old male residing on the West Coast. The participant is employed in the biopharmaceutical sector and identified as originating from India from the ancestral Hindu and Muslim traditions but not practicing them.

Table 3: *Participant 3: Content, Themes, and Codes*

Content	Themes	Codes
When Tajfel published the social identity theory, I was 7. I do not think that social identity should be group dependent. I enjoy mingling with different ethnic groups while listening to music, eating foods, and travelling. But what I do is to expand my knowledge and see how people interact. I enjoy being a fellow sojourner on the trip of self-knowledge while interacting with others. I am now wiser than I was at 20, 30, or 40. In my 20s and 30s, work and achievements were priorities. Once I turned 40, balancing work with relaxation became important. I do not think of myself as a social identity. What others think of me is not important to me. What I think about myself is important. This	Agreed with social identity theory but stated that social identity should not be dependent on the opinions of others as individuals or as members of groups.	Courage Humility Openness Self-knowledge Tolerance Wisdom

Content	Themes	Codes
philosophy took some time to develop.		
In Eastern cultures, self-awareness is emphasized as a path of self-discovery and no attachment. I agree with Wreczycki's sustainable social value model. Self-awareness leads to self-reflection for effective emotional management. This is how we explore the self and evaluate our intentions. I introspect to ensure that I am on the right path. I am perceptive and stay away from people who find it challenging to manage their emotions.	Brought the Eastern perspective to self-awareness. Agreed with the sustainable social value model. Emphasized the value of humility to introspect and self-reflect to evaluate intentions on the journey of self-discovery.	Caution Courage Emotional management Humility Intentionality Introspection Self-awareness Self-discovery Self-reflection
I believe that in Western society religion and spirituality are outward expressions of what we do as part of organizations, churches, charities, and the like. To me as a person originating from Eastern culture, spirituality is an inward growth, and it comes as a spiritual matter from my own reflections. Furthermore, anyone can achieve spirituality and balance, which are the same. Balance comes from not craving what we do not need. Lastly, the spiritual ladder of inner growth involves different things such as meditation, chanting, going	Does not exclude the existence of spirituality in any religious tradition but pursues spiritual growth through secular modalities. Uses self-reflection for spiritual growth. Pursues spiritual growth from inner knowing that less is more and believes in detachment. Uses several modalities to pursue spiritual growth.	Devotion Discernment Self-awareness Self-reflection Wisdom

Content	Themes	Codes
silent for several days to self-reflect, using those tactics to explore the inner spiritual self.		
I discuss my philosophy with others and the importance of the human spirit versus the ego. I emphasize that letting the ego go is difficult but crucial to spiritual growth.	Discusses his philosophy with others. Emphasizes inner growth while diminishing the ego. Discerns when to engage with others and when to retreat to maintain and sustain inner balance.	Balance Discernment Generosity Faith Hope
I impart my philosophies with people I interact with family members, friends, neighbors, and others. I maintain healthy boundaries with people, especially those who appear emotionally unbalanced. I enjoy watching the sunset. I find it philosophical. The human ego is all about control. The book and the movie <i>Life of Pi</i> show that human life is in the various stages of letting go. It is like letting go of the house one lives in. Once a person learns about control and the state of being attached to things that they do not care about anymore, it is easier to become free because what happens other people will accept us for who we are rather than what we own.	Expresses hope that letting go of attachment to material possessions will result in being unconditionally accepted by others.	Humility Self-care Self-development

Research Question 1

The participant revealed the traits of (a) courage, (b) humility, (c) openness, (d) self-knowledge, (e) tolerance, and (f) wisdom. Although the participant agreed with social identity theory, the contributor contested the potential dependence of social identity on

others as individuals or members of groups. The participant identified as being in search for the highest self while travelling the world to get to know different people and learning about their way of life.

Research Question 2

The participant revealed the traits of (a) caution, (b) courage, (c) emotional management, (d) humility, (e) intentionality, (f) introspection, (g) self-awareness, (h) self-discovery, and (i) self-reflection. The participant expanded the view on self-awareness through the lens of Eastern culture. While the participant agreed with the pillars and linearity of Wreczycki's (2021) sustainable social value model, the emphasis on humility to introspect and self-reflect for effective emotional management while alone or interacting with others was helpful to him to connect self-awareness with emotional maturity and sovereignty.

Research Question 3

The participant revealed the traits of (a) devotion, (b) discernment, (c) self-awareness, (d) self-reflection, (e) spiritual growth, and (f) wisdom. As not affiliated with a religious tradition, the participant perceives spirituality as inner peace and uses self-reflection for spiritual growth based on detachment and the philosophy of less is more.

Research Question 4

The participant expressed (a) balance, (b) discernment, (c) generosity, (d) faith, (e) hope, (f) humility, (g) self-care, and (h) self-development. The participant believes in and practices moral character formation and sustainability to interact with others to learn about their lives and expand knowledge about other cultures. The participant considers being perceptive and maintaining relations with minimal maintenance with people as individuals or in groups.

Participant 4

Participant 4 is a 50-year-old male residing in New England contributed the content below to answer four research questions. The participant did not disclose the source of income. The participant identified as originating from and practicing the Native American Mohegan tradition.

Table 4: *Participant 4: Content, Themes, and Codes*

Content	Themes	Codes
I have not heard of Tajfel's social identity theory. While I agree with the sense of belonging and pride in	Emphasized the importance of belonging to a tribe. Cautioned about	Care

Content	Themes	Codes
connection with a tribe membership and a source of identity, I want to emphasize that this must be a healthy relationship between an individual and the tribe. Simply put, the individual must not be superficially inflated or diminished by the tribe. My heritage is Native American Mohegan. Although I am a Mohegan, there is a lot more to me than my heritage. Since boyhood, I have felt like a Mohegan but wanted to evolve and pursue dreams bigger than myself. In my tradition, we call this path following the Great Spirit.	false pride in connection with tribe membership that must not interfere with self-development achieved through being centered following the Mohegan's rituals while interacting with others and the environment.	Cohesion Commitment Courage Egalitarianism Humility Integrity Joy Mercy Perseverance Self-care Self-restraint Social justice
To relate to everyone and everything requires razor-sharp self-awareness without inflating self-importance. I agree with Wreczycki's pillars starting from self-awareness and leading to socially conscious living though emotional balance and the use of free will to self-constrain and make good choices. When we feel connected to one another and our environment, we naturally care for ourselves while caring for others and the environment.	Emphasized the critical importance of the Mohegan tradition's cohesion to treat all and the environment in a kind manner.	Care Cohesion Commitment Courage Egalitarianism Humility Integrity Joy Mercy Perseverance

Content	Themes	Codes
		Self-care Self-restraint Social justice
<p>Native spirituality is not a religion but a way of life. We have many beliefs that may differ from the mainstream. Our main belief is that we are all connected with all things that surround us. That means all skin color – red, white, black, yellow, and others – all animals, plants, rocks, water, earth, sun, and the universe. The state of inner peace and harmony is keeping centered. The law of being good to each other, taking care of each other, and loving one another. We do this with ceremony, sweat lodge, dance, singing, music, food, fire, water, herbs, meditation, vision quest, and other celebrations. Our harmony is shared together by helping one another through celebration, praying, dance, music, ceremony, singing, meditation, and sweat lodge. The sweat lodge we had just performed was the grandmother (wisdom, love, peace), and it was formidable while the Earth and ancestors spoke.</p>	<p>Interpreted the Mohegan tradition as a way of life rather than a goal in life to be achieved. Emphasized the foundational connection with all humans and the environment as part of the Mohegan’s spirituality celebrated through inner peace and harmony and expressed not only in daily life but during tribal gatherings to participate in ceremonies, sweat lodge, dancing, singing, playing music, sitting by the fire and enjoying eating food spiced with herbs, drinking water, and meditating.</p>	Care Cohesion Commitment Courage Egalitarianism Humility Integrity Joy Mercy Perseverance Self-care Self-restraint Social justice
<p>National culture is a big combination of two simple words. The first implies a specific contiguous territory. But we share the United States of America’s nationality with the Hawaiians and</p>	<p>Emphasized simplicity in conceptualizing the social phenomena of interest to derive meaning. Pointed at the U.S. diversity as a nation that occupies not</p>	Care Cohesion Commitment

Content	Themes	Codes
Alaskans as states not to mention the territories overseas. Even in a contiguous territory, there may be regional variances depending on what is important for the local inhabitants. For as long as all of us value our unity as <i>E Pluribus Unum</i> out of many one, we can coexist in peace and harmony. I live through the lens of my Mohegan tradition applying my tribe's spirituality as a path of self-discovery while learning about other regions. I am open to learning but rely on my principles and my tribe's spirituality to stay centered.	only a contiguous territory but distant lands.	Courage Egalitarianism Humility Integrity Joy Mercy Perseverance Self-care Self-restraint Social justice

Research Question 1

The participant revealed the traits of (a) care, (b) cohesion, (c) commitment, (d) courage, (e) egalitarianism, (f) humility, (g) integrity, (h) joy, (i) mercy, (j) perseverance, (k) peace, (l) self-care, (m) self-restraint, and (n) social justice. The participant emphasized the importance of belonging to the Mohegan tribe for social identity but warned about false pride as the ego's expression. The participant amplified inner peace as a way of interacting with others and the Earth. The participant's social identity is closely tied with the ancestral heritage and deep roots to practice native spirituality in service to others and the natural environment.

Research Question 2

The participant revealed the traits of (a) care, (b) cohesion, (c) commitment, (d) courage, (e) egalitarianism, (f) humility, (g) integrity, (h) joy, (i) mercy, (j) perseverance, (k) self-care, (l) self-restraint, and (m) social justice. He agreed with Wreczycki's (2021) sustainable social value model and its linearity. Through a sense of belonging to the Mohegan tradition focused on conscious and meaningful living, the participant finds integrity.

Research Question 3

The participant revealed the traits of (a) care, (b) cohesion, (c) commitment, (d) courage, (e) egalitarianism, (f) harmony, (g) humility, (h) integrity, (i) joy, (j) mercy, (k) perseverance, (l) self-care, (m) self-restraint, and (n) social justice. He referred to Mohegan spirituality as a way of life in harmony with selfhood, others, and the environment. The contributor participates in tribal rituals to sustain Mohegan spirituality.

Research Question 4

The participant revealed the traits of (a) care, (b) cohesion, (c) commitment, (d) courage, (e) egalitarianism, (f) humility, (g) integrity, (h) joy, (i) mercy, (j) perseverance, (k) self-care, (l) self-restraint, (m) simplicity, and (n) social justice. The participant focused on simplicity in social settings while pursuing the Mohegan way of life. The philosophy focuses on inner peace and harmony with all existence.

Participant 5

Participant 5 is a 33-year-old female residing on the East Coast. The participant is employed in the transportation sector and identified as originating from but not practicing the Catholic tradition.

Table 5: *Participant 5: Content, Themes, and Codes*

Content	Themes	Codes
Social identity is personal. Our identity should not be dependent on others. Reputation is important, but we are a lot more than our reputation.	Referred to social identity as personal. Emphasized emotional sovereignty in relation to social identity. Pointed at reputation as important. Amplified the broader meaning of social identity beyond reputation.	Courage Emotional maturity Emotional sovereignty Reputation Self-awareness
I agree with the model. Self-awareness allows me to feel my emotions and modulate my thinking to be constructive toward myself and others.	The participant emphasized the ability to feel emotions and monitoring thinking about feelings to feel independent of the emotional flow. With	Courage Emotional maturity Emotional sovereignty Freedom

Content	Themes	Codes
When I feel and see my emotions, I feel free.	emotional sovereignty, the participant can interact with others from the position of self-confidence and be free of any destructive interactions.	Peace Self-awareness
To me, spirituality is a feeling, an understanding, and a belief in something greater than myself. Spirituality is unique to all. I believe the more we invest in the law of attraction the more constructive experiences we will be subjected to. I achieve inner peace and harmony through fitness training and diving into an enjoyable book. I enjoy outdoor activities such as hiking, kayaking, and biking.	The participant pointed at higher power as the source of spirituality and emphasized the individual perception of spirituality.	Courage Inspiration Reverence
I share my inner peace and harmony with others via consistent outreach and continuous motivational speaking, turning negatives into positives, donations, and kindness events such as the ones hosted by the Kindness Crew.	The participant is a charitable individual involved in motivational outreach, donating time and resources, and participating in kindness.	Courage Charity Generosity Kindness

Research Question 1

The participant revealed the traits of (a) courage, (b) emotional maturity, (c) emotional sovereignty, (d) reputation, and (e) self-awareness. The participant interpreted social identity as a personal endeavor. The participant relied on self-awareness and emotional maturity and sovereignty to draw a difference between reputation and social identity.

Research Question 2

The participant revealed the traits of (a) courage, (b) emotional maturity, (c) emotional sovereignty, (d) freedom, and (e) self-awareness. The participant relies on self-awareness for self-observation and modulation of emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Via these modalities, the participant stays constructive and maintains inner peace.

Research Question 3

The participant revealed the reliance on higher power as a source of spirituality. She emphasized reverence for higher power. The participant amplified the personal nature of spirituality. The participant revealed the traits of (a) courage, (b) inspiration, and (c) reverence.

Research Question 4

The participant revealed the traits of (a) courage, (b) charity, (c) generosity, and (d) kindness. As a person not affiliated with a religious tradition, the participant perceives spirituality as being involved in something larger than selfhood. The participant sustains spirituality through commitment to principles and enacting them in social settings via charity for sustainable social value.

Participant 6

Participant 6 is a 30-year-old female residing on the East Coast. She is employed in the transportation sector and identified as originating from and practicing the Catholic tradition.

Table 6: *Participant 6: Content, Themes, and Codes*

Content	Themes	Codes
To me, social identity is a personal perception that can be fueled by emotions and feelings. I am a granddaughter, daughter, sibling, fiancé, co-worker, and many other roles. What connects them are my principles based on my faith and ancestral values. I am 30 years old, so work achievements are important to me. But family is most	Pointed at social identity as personal rather than dictated by a group membership. Emphasized faith and family as a source of values. Focused on deriving self-esteem from within.	Courage Faith Family Introspection Principled Self-discovery

Content	Themes	Codes
important even when things get challenging. My self-esteem comes from who I am and am becoming.		
Self-awareness is critical for self-observation, self-reflection, and monitoring how I interact with others. I am a human resources practitioner, so my work demands of me to always be knowledgeable and professional. Emotional control and sovereignty are critical in my line of work. I always do what is best given the circumstances. As an experienced human resources professional, I apply what I practice at work based on my personal values to all life situations. This is my shield and armor to ensure that destructive influence from outside is minimized.	Agreed with the sustainable social value model's pillars. Pointed at self-observation and self-reflection as effective modalities to control emotions to be emotionally sovereign. Amplified self-knowledge as the most effective way to interact with others professionally and in personal settings.	Courage Emotional control Emotional sovereignty Knowledge Professionalism Self-awareness Self-knowledge Self-observation Self-reflection
To me spirituality means I feel and believe that there is something greater than just the physical world we live in. I believe that when our loved ones are no longer here with us physically, they are still here spiritually watching over us. In relation to religion, I am Catholic and do believe that heaven is real and where we go in the afterlife. In relation to religion, I usually attend church weekly and pray for	The participant relies on Catholic spirituality as a source of higher power, hope, and inner and outer peace. The participant prays for health, family, and fulfillment. The participant practices the Golden Rule.	Care Constructive Courage Fulfillment Hope Peace

Content	Themes	Codes
family, health, and my desires for the future. I try to enter each day with a good attitude, putting out the type of energy of positivity I would like to receive in return. Even on bad days I try my best to remain at peace with the belief that tough days and times will pass, and tomorrow is a new day.		
I share my spirituality by giving advice when friends or family members need it most, sharing my perspective that all things in life will work themselves out. I always try my best to be a positive energy and a person to be around, hoping that I will inspire those who need it and attract others with the same energy to me.	Shares spirituality by caring for relatives and friends to uplift them. Hopes that all issues will be constructively resolved. Stays positive to attract constructive outcomes through reciprocity.	Care Compassion Courage Hope Inspiration Positivity Reciprocity Uplifting

Research Question 1

The participant revealed the traits of (a) courage, (b) faithfulness, (c) family orientation, (d) introspection, (e) being principled, and (f) self-discovery. The participant emphasized social identity as a personal endeavor within the social context. The contributor relies on ancestral faith and family values for social identity's sustainability.

Research Question 2

The participant revealed the traits of (a) courage, (b) emotional control, (c) emotional sovereignty, (d) knowledge, (e) professionalism, (f) self-awareness, (g) self-observation, (h) self-knowledge, and (i) self-reflection. The participant agreed with the pillars of

Wreczycki's (2021) sustainable social value model emphasizing the value of self-observation and self-reflection to modulate emotions, feelings, and thoughts to act in accordance with the chosen profession regardless of the setting and circumstances.

Research Question 3

The participant revealed the traits of (a) care, (b) constructivism, (c) courage, (d) fulfillment, (e) hope, and (f) peace. The participant's spirituality flows from the Catholic faith. The participant is practicing the Golden Rule for selfhood sustainability.

Research Question 4

The participant revealed the traits of (a) care, (b) compassion, (c) courage, (d) hope, (e) inspiration, (f) positivity, (g) reciprocity, and (h) uplifting. The participant relies on Catholic spirituality and the practice of the Golden Rule while interacting with others in a professional setting, allowing the same standards to inform her behavior in personal situations. The participant cares for relatives and friends through prayers for health and fulfillment.

Discussion

Six participants' content, themes, and codes are summarized in Table 7. Participants confirmed all questions. Leading codes of each question are cited below.

Table 7: *Participants' Summary of Codes Across the Research Questions*

Participant	RQ1	RQ2	RQ3	RQ4
1	Patience	Patience	Care	Care
2	Humility	Forgiveness	Humility	Charity
3	Wisdom	Humility	Spirituality	Hope
4	Peace	Integrity	Harmony	Perseverance
5	Self-awareness	Self-awareness	Reverence	Kindness
6	Self-discovery	Self-knowledge	Care	Care

All participants were value-based individuals. They represented two genders and three states on the East Coast in the New England region, one state on the West Coast, and one Mid-Western state. The participants exhibited courage to partake in a semi

structured interview based on four questions, which required narrative responses calling for conceptualization of their selfhood within the context of (a) social identity, (b) self-awareness, (c) emotional balance, (d) emotional sovereignty, (e) the ascension of free will to dwell in God or believing in something greater than themselves for the secular participants, (f) making moral choices and acting on them for sustainable social value, (g) relying on spirituality to sustain the integrated self-known as selfhood, and (h) contribute this energy to the national cohesion while being morally vigilant to insulate themselves from group dynamics.

All traits extracted from Matthew 5:3-12 except for commitment revealed themselves from the participants' content based on themes. Table 8 summarizes by participant the count of overlapping values for each research question.

Table 8: *Participants' Traits Overlapping with Jesus' Values Extracted from Matthew 5:3-12*

Participants	RQ1	RQ2	RQ3	RQ4
1: Religious male (65), Midwest	8	2	9	2
2: Secular female (57) New England	5	4	1	1
3: Secular male (52), West Coast	1	1	0	2
4: Secular male (50), New England	11	11	11	11
5: Secular female (33), New England	0	0	0	0
6: Religious female (30), New England	0	0	1	1

Participant 4, the 50-year-old male participant from New England, revealed the highest number of values overlapping with Jesus' values based on Matthew 5:3-12. Although the participant shared being a secular person, the partaker is a descendant of the Mohegan tribe, and his traits consistently revealed themselves across the four research questions. The participant who came in second was Participant 1, the 65-year-old male from the Midwest originating from a religious country. While the participant's profession as an attorney supported integrity and social justice, the traits that overlapped with Jesus such as (a) care, (b) cohesion, (c) humility, (d) joy, (e) mercy, and (f) perseverance may have developed as a result of hardships in the youth spent in an Eastern Bloc country and the ability to start a new life in the United States.

Participant 2, the 57-year-old secular female from New England, revealed a moderate number of overlapping values with Jesus. The participant's concern with the declining

values in the changing and polarizing society drove her responses while her commitment to charitable work provided her with a sense of purpose and fulfillment. Participant 3, the 52-year-old secular male participant from the West Coast, moderately overlapped with Jesus' values as well. The participant's originating country of India and the mix of two ancestral religions (i.e., Islam and Hinduism) may have influenced his views. Participant 6, the 30-year-old religious female from New England, overlapped with Jesus' value of care within the context of spiritual development and sharing the results of it socially. Participant 5, the 33-year-old secular female from New England, did not overlap with Jesus' values. However, the participant's courage revealed her concern with her reputation, peaceful disposition, reverence for spiritual growth, and generosity.

Although all participants stated not being familiar with Tajfel's (1978) social identity theory, they agreed with belonging to a group as a source of (a) belonging, (b) pride, and (c) self-esteem. However, due to the changing national culture impacted by declining values and polarization within the context of the sociopolitical spectrum, the participants recommended caution and moral vigilance while considering group membership. The participants emphasized the importance of self-awareness in emotional management for emotional maturity and sovereignty to be able to rely on self-concept from within to ascend the will to make moral choices for sustainable social value.

Limitations and Future Direction

The study focused on the participants' familiarity with Tajfel's (1978) social identity theory, its meaning, and agreeing or disagreeing with its application in contemporary U.S. culture. The knowledge of Wreczycki's (2021) sustainable social value model and the linearity of its five pillars with special emphasis on the connection between self-awareness and emotional maturity to make the other three pillars possible was analyzed. The participants also shared their perception of spirituality, its meaning, and its application in their social environments to share how they contribute to the national cohesion while at the same time protecting themselves from group dynamics.

The study was limited to six participants; all of them, except for two, were residents of New England. To provide more diversity, more participants from other regions could be asked to answer the research questions. Also, since the study revealed that emotional stress can break the connection between self-awareness and emotional sovereignty, inquiring about emotional stress recovery modalities is worthwhile to aid self-transformation by committing to spiritual growth.

Conclusion

To provide research content, six participants – three females and three males – shared their perceptions of social identity, the role of spirituality, and self-transformation within the context of U.S. culture. Tajfel's (1978) social identity theory was referenced following Dean and Newton's (2022) resetting and returning to the drawing board method, to inquire if and to what extent social identity theory applies in the contemporary U.S. culture. The national culture analysis referenced key events from the 1980s, 1990s, and the first and second decades of the new millennium. Since U.S. culture functions within the global dynamic impacted by technology, the answers to four research questions were expected to provide data to inform whether technology supports sustaining moral character as a repository of values or may be a hindrance.

Wreczycki's (2019) working definition of national culture as a repository of values, rights, and obligations was referenced. Wreczycki's (2021) sustainable social value model was used to examine selfhood sustainability. Jesus' values derived from Matthew 5:3-12 extracted by Winston (2002) and Wreczycki were referenced as a benchmark to assess how participants' traits derived from the content, themes, and codes compared. Robbins' (1996) sociorhetorical interpretation was used to move toward what it means to balance between engaged and disengaged – to be in this world but not of it. The John 14:27 pericope was analyzed exegetically to explain the concept of self-awareness and self-transformation using Lancaster and Palframan's (2009) position that spirituality plays a noteworthy role in personal growth based on (a) openness to transcendent power, (b) self-acceptance, and (c) elevation above ego's constructs to relate to selfhood.

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The Effect of Organizational Culture on Employee Flourishing in the Workplace

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Abstract

Culture is a concept that has existed for centuries and serves as the driving force behind every organization. It is what identifies a group of people or an organization, and it cannot exist in isolation. Culture determines how an organization can flourish and thrive within its ecosystem. Culture is dynamic and can be transmitted to others (Northouse, 2013). A kingdom culture is centered on the teachings and examples of Christ. It is built on ethical values, integrity, transparency, honesty, empathy, trust, and servant leadership. Kingdom culture promotes an environment where employees are encouraged to uphold the organization's moral values when performing their duties. It focuses on glorifying God in every aspect of its operations while promoting employee well-being. An organization's leaders are an integral part of its culture. Leaders initiate the process of culture creation within their organization. Leaders who understand organizational culture can interpret employee behaviors and cultivate a thriving environment, leading to long-term success. This paper discusses the importance of culture in an organization and its effect on performance and long-term effectiveness. It highlights the impact of an organization's leadership in creating culture, as well as the power of culture in shaping the trajectory of an organization. Furthermore, the text explores the influence of an organization's culture on its employees and how leaders can employ principles of kingdom business culture, such as ethical values, integrity, transparency, honesty, empathy, trust, and servant leadership to positively impact the organization and contribute to the well-being of its employees.

Keywords: organization, culture, employee flourishing, leadership

Introduction

Understanding Culture

The world is a rich and colorful tapestry of people from different ethnic backgrounds, with diverse values, beliefs, and mindsets. These attributes create culture, the fulcrum on which the world spins. Culture can be described as a distinctive behavior or characteristic of a group of people or organization. It is the “way of life, customs, and script of a group of people” (Northouse, 2013, p. 384). All over the world people proudly identify with their culture and would do anything to defend it. There are several schools of thought on culture; however, the central theme highlights how people behave in a group.

Schein (2010) posited that culture is a powerful phenomenon that describes the foundation of the social order that people live in and the rules that govern them. It is the collective programming of the mind that differentiates members of one group from another (Hofstede et al., 2010). Merriam-Webster (n.d.) defined *culture* as the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterize an institution or organization. “Culture is an abstraction, yet the forces that are created in social and organizational situations deriving from culture are powerful” (Schein, 2010, p. 7). Cultures have the power to create great things and also blindly destroy things that do not fit (Mhanna, 2017).

People are not born with an innate culture; rather, they learn and eventually adapt to the culture of the group to which they were born (Hofstede et al., 2010). Culture is constantly reenacted and created by interactions among people and shaped by their behavior (Schein, 2010). Culture is an integral part of any entity or group, so it is important to have a clear understanding of the fundamental impact of culture.

Just as culture is associated with human groups, it can also be associated with organizations, which are entities made up of different groups. Culture is a powerful force that operates within an organization and is intertwined with its day-to-day activities (Schein, 2010). Culture is pervasive and influences all aspects of how an organization deals with its primary task, various environments, and internal operations (Schein, 2010). An organization’s culture is the fuel that keeps it running; therefore, it is necessary for organizations to consistently assess and review their culture to determine the best way forward.

Organizational Culture

The culture of an organization is essential for its existence. Understanding how it works is crucial to its success or failure. An organization’s culture reflects how things are done internally, encompassing “values, beliefs, attitudes, assumptions, norms, mission

statements, goals, personal interests, behaviors, and management styles” (Witt et al., 2015, p. 114).

Culture is deeply rooted in the core of the organization and is continuously being passed on to its members. It communicates the unspoken rules and practices of the group to both existing and new members. Cultural values are underlying assumptions that may be hard to express, even for those familiar with the culture (Caligiuri, 2012). New members, in their attempt to assimilate into a group, adopt the culture and begin to demonstrate the same behaviors as the rest of the group, whether positive or negative.

An organization’s culture is created based on the beliefs, values, and assumptions of its founder, the learning experiences of group members as the organization evolves, as well as new beliefs, values, and assumptions brought in by new members and leaders (Schein, 2010). Culture is the DNA of an organization and cannot be easily separated from it. Changing an organization’s culture is complex and requires detailed planning and commitment from all stakeholders (Schein, 2010). Culture has a powerful effect on the performance and long-term effectiveness of organizations, and leadership within an organization must understand the intricacies of culture and how it ties into its corporate structure (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). This could help in major decision making and actions that impact the ecosystem of the organization – employees, customers, products, and brands.

Types of Organizational Culture

According to Cameron and Quinn (2011), almost all organizations develop a dominant type of organizational culture that enables the organization to become more consistent, stable, adaptable, and flexible in dealing with its rapidly changing environment. The four dominant cultures that exist in an organization are clan, hierarchy, adhocracy, and market cultures (Cameron & Quinn, 2011).

The clan culture is a family-type organizational culture that focuses on shared values and goals, cohesion, participation, and collaboration and encourages teamwork, employee involvement programs, and corporate commitment to employees (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). The Adhocracy culture is “dynamic and entrepreneurial, with a focus on risk-taking, innovation, and doing things first” (“4 Types of Organizational Culture,” 2013). The hierarchy organizational culture is characterized by a formal, controlled, and structured work environment where employees are governed by procedures and rule enforcement (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). The market-oriented culture is results-oriented, with a focus on competition, achievement, and getting the job done (“4 Types of Organizational Culture,” 2013).

Organizations are constantly evolving, and their culture changes over time. In the earliest stages of the organizational life cycle, organizations tend to display an adhocracy culture characterized by entrepreneurship and move towards the clan culture as they develop (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). As the organization grows, it begins to emphasize and shift to the hierarchy culture, which is eventually supplemented by a focus on the market culture (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). At every point, “the right culture will be one that closely fits the direction and strategy of a particular organization as it confronts its own issues and the challenges of a particular time” (“4 Types of Organizational Culture,” 2013).

Who Determines the Culture Within an Organization

An organization is formed when one or more individuals perceive that they can use the coordinated and concerted action of a group of people to accomplish goals that individual action cannot (Schein, 2010). As an organization evolves, it creates its own culture; developing that culture is a journey that requires adequate preparation (Gostick & Elton, 2012; Schein, 2010). Organizational culture is developed through the constant interaction and communication between its leadership and members (Hackman & Johnson, 2013). “Culture is the behavior that results when a group arrives at a set of generally unspoken and unwritten rules for how they will work together” (Heathfield, 2020, 2: What Makes Up Your Culture?).

An organization’s culture is typically created unconsciously based on the values, beliefs, behaviors, underlying assumptions of its founder and leadership, and the learning experiences of group members as the organization evolves (Jerom, 2013; Schein, 2010). The organization’s founder’s philosophy and leadership play a significant role in setting its culture (Robbins & Judge, 2009).

Founders have their own well-articulated theories about how the groups should work, they choose the basic mission and the environmental context in which the group operates, and they select group members who they think would align with their values and beliefs as colleagues and subordinates, thereby shaping the kinds of response that the group will make to succeed in its environment and to integrate itself (Schein, 2010). “When a group identifies that a particular culture is undermining its performance in the competitive market, the organizational leaders and the founders of the organization will normally review the culture and initiate change” (Jerom, 2013).

The Role of Leadership in Culture

Leadership and culture are two complex phenomena with several dimensions. Culture and leadership cannot be separated mainly because leaders initiate the process of culture creation when they create groups and organizations. After a culture is

established, the leaders must determine the criteria for leadership and select those who will lead within the organization.

“If the elements of a culture become dysfunctional, it is the unique function of leadership to perceive the functional and dysfunctional elements of the existing culture and to manage cultural evolution and change in such a way that the group can survive in a changing environment” (Schein, 2010, p. 22). To effectively manage culture, leaders must have an in-depth understanding of their organization’s culture.

Challenges of Managing Culture Within an Organization

According to Giscombe (2011), “an important aspect of navigating an organization is knowing its culture which is the unwritten rules, or implicitly communicated workplace norms and behaviors that are necessary to succeed within an organization.” The way an organization’s leaders and followers think, feel, and act as they solve problems that arise is determined by the existing culture (Hofstede et al., 2010). A good culture opens the door to innovative solutions. Unfortunately, most organizations are “unaware of their culture until it is challenged, experience a new culture, or made overt and explicit” (Cameron & Quinn, 2011, p. 19).

Organizational leaders must thoroughly know and understand their culture and ensure that it is consistent across the whole organization (Allen, n.d.). The culture must align with business strategy, company goals, and objectives, as well as the company brand; it must create the desired environment for employees to thrive (Allen, n.d.).

Want (2003) discussed that for a corporate culture to work, organizations must focus on closing the gap between business and culture planning. They must create a corporate culture that embraces change and builds a broad consensus for culture change at all levels of the organization (Want, 2003). They must take risks, break down the bureaucratic mindset through empowerment and alternative performance standards that promote innovation, invest in leadership development at all levels, and empower people to lead the change process (Want, 2003).

What Makes a Good Workplace Culture

According to Burchell and Robin (2011), a great workplace has a culture where employees trust their organization and leaders, take pride in what they do, and enjoy the people they work with. Freedman (2014) highlighted that great companies create experiences that make the workplace unique, communicate the organization’s priorities, demonstrate leadership competence, and invest in engaging their employees. For a workplace to be great, there must be a total mind shift of everyone in the organization (Burchell & Robin, 2011). When organizations encourage shared activities that promote interaction, they foster great camaraderie, leading to long-lasting workplace

relationships (Freedman, 2014). These types of environments set the stage for employee flourishing.

Leaders play a critical role in creating a great workplace and have the final authority and say in what makes a workplace stand out. In the best companies, leaders at all levels have a strong commitment to establishing strong ties between the organization and employees, enhancing trust and camaraderie in the workplace (Burchell & Robin, 2011).

Employees are a crucial part of an organization, and it is necessary that they feel valued in their work environment. Organizations must always prioritize their employees and invest in their total well-being. A toxic culture creates a lot of tension, resentment, burnout, and low morale among employees and could eventually derail the organization. A thriving workplace enhances job satisfaction and happiness, while minimizing stress and emotional exhaustion (Young, 2023). To enhance employee performance, an organization must foster a healthy and collaborative environment that prioritizes the physical, emotional, and social well-being of its employees (Gostick & Elton, 2012).

Employee Flourishing in the Workplace

Leaders often have a different perception of their organization's culture than employees do; this gap negatively affects employee engagement, productivity, and innovation, ultimately resulting in higher turnover rates (Warner, 2024). This disparity can be reduced if leaders promote a productive culture where employees can thrive and flourish. Employee flourishing is the ability of an employee to thrive within a group or organization. Flourishing focuses on the optimal state of human functioning where individuals are at their very best in terms of well-being, performance, or character (Young, 2023).

Forward-thinking leaders focus on creating supportive workplaces that speak to employees' fundamental human needs: to have authentic connections, meaningful work, achievement, and moments of positive emotions such as awe, gratitude, and joy that energize and rejuvenate the employees (Young, 2023).

Kingdom Culture

Kingdom culture "is a worldview approach to life where Christian biblical principles help to build or determine one's values, purpose, and strategies" (Lloyd, 2024). It emphasizes the life, leadership, and teachings of Christ who was focused on individuals, scripture, purpose, and himself (Engstrom, 1976, pp. 41-42). Kingdom culture embodies "principles, truths, and wisdom to advance the Kingdom of God on earth, under the revelation of Jesus Christ as the King of the kingdom" (Lloyd, 2024).

According to Bishop (2013), man was created with God's DNA and automatically inherited God-given attributes and values. Unfortunately, humanity lost some of these divine attributes and values after the fall of man. However, reconciliation through Jesus Christ makes these God-given attributes and values available to those who will receive them. Kingdom culture upholds a much higher ethical approach to life (Lloyd, 2024) and requires a conscious mindset to apply its principles. These principles include ethical values, integrity, transparency, honesty, empathy, trust, and servant leadership.

Kingdom Business Principles

In today's society, where morals are declining, it is crucial to understand the significance of values and how they influence and shape the lives of people and organizations. Values are an integral part of people's identity; people cannot separate themselves from their values (Hultman & Gellerman, 2002).

An organization's culture reflects its values and core belief system. Leaders must ensure these values are communicated to all employees. According to Warner (2024), employees value and engage with leaders who are trustworthy and genuine. In today's business environment, a business-as-usual mindset is no longer effective for running an organization, and leaders require a higher standard of accountability, integrity, trust, and honesty. Organizations must find innovative ways to create a work environment that promotes employee flourishing.

One innovative area that leaders can explore is kingdom culture where they can apply kingdom values and principles in their leadership style. "Applying kingdom principles in an organization does not contradict sound business management practices but rather adds a new dimension to management principles" (Lloyd, 2024). Companies like Chick-fil-A and Hobby Lobby have successfully applied these principles in their business and continuously lead in their industries. Leaders who demonstrate Christ-like values and principles could create a healthy and thriving work environment where employees flourish. Some key principles that contribute to employee well-being include ethical values, integrity, transparency, honesty, empathy, trust, and servant leadership.

Ethical Values

According to Ciulla (2014), ethics is the ability to differentiate between right and wrong, or good and evil, as it pertains to the actions, choices, and characters of human beings. Whether positive or negative, one's character plays a significant role in determining ethical behavior. Ethics becomes more intriguing when viewed from a cultural perspective. Culture influences and shapes human behavior. What may seem unethical in one culture could be considered ethical in another. Kingdom culture does not accommodate situational ethics; godly principles do not change based on culture or accepted practices (Hillman, 2024).

Corporate culture often dictates business conduct, and employees inherit whatever the accepted practice is even though it may be unethical (Hillman,2024). In a kingdom culture, employees should not be under pressure to do things that contradict their values and the general standards and code of ethics of the organization. Organizations must therefore create environments that nurture ethics and allow employees to bring their authentic selves to work. Employees should not feel the need to adopt a different persona to fit in, as this can lead to frustration and prevent them from performing at their best.

Organizations should create an environment where employees can question things without being penalized. This could prevent a whistleblower situation and scandals for the organization. Organizations must therefore promote character development and ethical behavior by creating an environment of integrity, transparency, and honesty.

Integrity

Integrity is becoming an important quality in leadership today. *Integrity* is the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles (*Oxford English Dictionary*, n.d.). Leaders continue to face increased challenges with integrity and must make it a priority if they want to establish trust and credibility with their employees. There have been scandals within organizations where leaders have excelled in their craft but failed the morality test. These scandals have impacted the level of trust in leadership. Employees are looking for leaders with integrity who are dependable and trustworthy and can provide solutions to pressing issues without compromise. Leaders can improve their level of integrity by developing character, setting boundaries, and adhering to them. A culture that focuses on integrity and builds a trusting relationship between leadership and employees enhances employee productivity and engagement.

Transparency

Transparency is essential for creating a constructive and high-performance culture (Moore, 2023). A transparent environment allows leaders to be upfront in their communication and to provide honest feedback. Leaders are unbiased and treat employees fairly and without discrimination. “A transparent workplace promotes consistent conversations between managers and employers with honest discussions about goals, objectives, and performance” (Rahaman,2023, 1: How Does Transparency Affect Organizational Performance?). It creates a “safe environment where employees can comfortably share their thoughts and concerns, without fear of retribution, fostering a culture of transparency and responsibility” (Warner, 2024, 1: Establish Open Communication). Encouraging transparency within the workplace promotes employee flourishing.

Honesty

Merriam-Webster (n.d.) defined *honesty* as adherence to the facts, fairness, straightforwardness of conduct, and a refusal to lie or deceive in any way. A kingdom culture must be based on honesty. This is highlighted in Matthew 5:37a, which specifically encourages the listener to be truthful in their communication. Leaders must be honest in all transactions and dealings with employees. They must avoid evasive responses that mislead or deceive employees. A culture of dishonesty and lies destroys trust and lowers employee morale, which impacts productivity. Embracing a culture of radical honesty improves decision making (Schaap, 2024) and creates an atmosphere of employee flourishing.

Empathy

Empathy is the ability to be sensitive to the needs of others and provide assistance when necessary. Empathy is often lacking in many highly competitive corporate cultures. Most organizations foster a culture of self-interest, where individuals strive to outshine their colleagues. Organizations must nurture a culture of empathy where leaders and employees can interpret the needs of each other and provide support. Leaders must show they care about the total well-being of employees. They should not only give instructions and commands but must be present, seek feedback, and be involved in the welfare of employees. They must be authentic, ask genuine questions, understand employee experiences, and discern employee mood to know their issues and needs. More informed and empathetic decision making will foster an environment where every team member feels valued and motivated which significantly enhances engagement and accountability (Warner, 2024).

Trust

Trust is sensitive and very difficult to build and must be held in high regard. A lot of effort is required to rebuild a broken trust relationship, and it is often nearly impossible to regain the original level of trust. Trust creates a safe place where employees can be themselves and promotes creativity and innovation. Trust is a powerful multiplier that greatly increases a team's productivity, adding real value to the organization (Feltman, 2019). Employees will only trust leaders who are committed and take full responsibility for their actions (Mostovicz et al., 2011). To build trust leaders must be good listeners, truthful, consistent, and honest. Ensuring confidentiality, showing appreciation for employee input, and taking action based on lessons learned from employee interactions are key to creating a high-trust atmosphere (Warner, 2024).

Servant Leadership

In Matthew 23:11-12, Jesus defined leadership as a service to others and he practiced that leadership style throughout his ministry. In contemporary times, servant leaders can be described as selfless and having a strong desire to serve others (Engstrom, 1976, p. 37).

Servant leaders serve others, empathize with them, are selfless, are organized, act as mentors, empower followers, and lead by example. According to Jaramillo et al. (2015), servant leaders act in the best interest of followers by prioritizing their individual growth and development. These actions result in higher levels of organizational commitment by followers. Servant leaders abide by principles of honesty and integrity, have high ethical standards, and always encourage an ethical organizational climate. When the interactions between leaders and followers are constant and direct, the leader's honesty, reliability, and trustworthiness can be directly manifested by the leader and assessed by close followers.

A servant leader brings order in a chaotic situation by identifying the root cause and providing a solution. When followers are lacking in some areas, a servant leader would normally spend time with them to develop them. The servant leader would provide mentoring and training opportunities for followers to help them in their growth and development. Another characteristic of servant leadership is to empower followers by listening, taking ideas and suggestions from them, and allowing them to be part of the decision-making process (Kouzes & Posner, 2012, pp. 18-19).

Servant leaders have a sense of ownership within an organization. They treat the organization as their own and are always looking for ways to minimize overhead costs without depriving followers of the basic tools needed to do their work. Servant leadership always considers followers first, empowers them, and draws out their full potential and capabilities. Organizations that promote a culture of servant leadership allow employees the opportunity to exemplify and replicate a character of service and ownership. When people have a sense of ownership, they tend to be effective and productive. They give their best to ensure that their organization succeeds. This creates a level of pride and accomplishment that enhances flourishing in all areas of their lives.

Conclusion

An organization's success has little to do with market forces, competitive positioning, and resource advantages; rather, it is based on its values, personal values, and vision (Cameron & Quinn, 2011) that drive the organizational culture. Successful cultures build high-purpose environments that are "filled with small, vivid signals designed to create a link between the present moment and the future ideal" (Coyle, 2018, p. 180). The major distinguishing feature in the success of companies is their organizational

culture. Corporate culture is often perceived as vague and disconnected from business performance, leading many companies to avoid measuring, managing, or developing their cultures (Want, 2003). To be successful, organizations must develop a transparent culture that values employees and encourages employee well-being.

Organizational leaders must understand the significant role they play in establishing culture. They must constantly find ways to nurture a good environment for employees to flourish. When employee well-being is properly established, there is room for creativity and innovation leading to long-term success and profitability for the organization. Leaders can create a workplace culture that promotes employee flourishing by prioritizing kingdom principles and values such as ethical values, integrity, transparency, honesty, empathy, trust, and servant leadership. By being accountable themselves, “leaders can create a ripple effect that shapes the entire organizational culture” (Warner, 2024, 2: Key Traits of Effective Leadership). When employees are engaged, they not only give back to their organizations but also to their communities, which promotes flourishing in society and inevitably glorifies God.

Author’s Biography

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Transforming Organizational Culture – A Case Study on Driving Innovation Through Strategic Culture Change

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Roundtable: Kingdom Business

Abstract

Change is a necessary process for the growth of modern organizations. However, many change initiatives fail because they neglect to change the organization's culture. Cameron and Quinn (2011) maintained that culture shapes many aspects of an organization, including performance, competitiveness, employee behavior, hiring and retention practices, communication, and decision making. This case study used Cameron and Quinn's Competing Values Framework and the associated Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument to determine the current and desired culture of the Programming Innovation Department (PID) within an international nongovernmental organization (INGO). The paper explores how the PID's current culture, leadership practices, systems, and processes align with the principles and values of God's kingdom. The author discusses possible barriers that may hinder the department from achieving the desired culture and provides recommendations to INGO leaders for driving strategic cultural change within their organizations to improve innovation and sustainability within the competitive INGO funding landscape.

Keywords: organizational culture, culture assessment, adhocratic culture, innovation, change management, international nongovernmental organization

Introduction

International nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) address worldwide social, environmental, and humanitarian challenges, often in challenging operational contexts. Kotter (2012) warned that modern organizations operate in increasingly complex and ambiguous environments due to globalization, technological disruption, and changing social trends. To adapt to these dynamic conditions, organizations must adopt more flexible business models and team-oriented strategies and leverage new technologies for quicker decision making, agile responses, and transformative innovation (Baran &

Woznyj, 2021; Kaivo-oja & Lauraeus, 2018; Kutz, 2011). In short, INGOs must respond to increasing environmental complexity by continuously developing innovative solutions that improve efficiency, reach more people, and maximize programming impact.

However, a significant challenge within INGOs is directing limited resources toward innovative action rather than immediate humanitarian needs. An organization's culture affects its approach to innovation (Azeem et al., 2021; Naranjo-Valencia et al., 2011). Organizational culture influences many elements, can resist change, and may hinder the adoption of new ideas and technologies (Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Schein, 2017). Managing organizational culture is thus a critical driver of innovation and organizational change. To ensure their organizations' continued effectiveness and relevance through innovative action, INGO leaders must create an organizational culture of experimentation and learning.

Organizational Overview

The organization studied is a faith-based, global network of about 6,000 staff in 120 country offices that deliver culturally relevant programs and build local capacity for sustainable change. The organization responds to major emergencies, fights disease and poverty, and promotes justice. Its programming expertise extends across various sectors, including health, nutrition, and food security. On average, the organization implements over 1,000 projects serving over 20 million individuals annually. The organization partners with local communities, churches, organizations, and governments to deliver relief and development assistance worldwide. This partnership approach facilitates a quick response to rapid-onset emergencies, often before other organizations arrive. The organization's programming principles, which guide how programs are designed and delivered, include promoting human dignity, respecting others' rights, carefully stewarding resources, and seeking the common good. As a faith-based entity, the organization's mission, goals, and programming principles align with the values of God's kingdom, such as serving others and taking intentional care of the poor and vulnerable (*New International Version Bible*, 1973/2013, James 1:27; Proverbs 19:17). The organization's work also contributes to the broader mission of answering God's call for the love and compassionate care of the vulnerable (*New International Version Bible*, 1973/2013, 1 John 3:18; Proverbs 31:8-9).

Survey Methodology

After securing permission from the Vice President, this author administered Cameron and Quinn's (2011) Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI) to the organization's Programming Innovation Department (PID). The PID comprises 75 staff across five units that design, implement, and monitor global humanitarian assistance

programs. The OCAI is based on the Competing Values Framework and consists of six questions (each with four alternatives) reliably representing an organization's culture (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). Respondents distributed 100 points between these four *competing values*, depending on the degree to which they believed each response reflected the situation within the department. Respondents selected the current and desired cultures they believed would be most appropriate for the department in 5 years by assigning the highest score to the most relevant alternative.

Employees received an orientation to the OCAI exercise at a departmental meeting, which also served as an opportunity to review the instrument and seek clarification. Respondents received a survey link to the OCAI via email with an introduction reiterating the survey's purpose and instructions for completion. Respondents received a reminder 7, 3, and 1 day before the 6-week data collection deadline, resulting in a 24% response rate.

PID Culture Analysis

The current author replicated Cameron and Quinn's (2011) analytic process to score the department's OCAI. Each score is the average across the six questions that measure each type of culture. Table 1 shows that the PID currently has a predominant orientation toward the clan culture with the highest *now* score of 37.3.

Table 1: PID OCAI Scores

Type of organizational culture	<i>Now</i> scores	<i>Preferred</i> scores
Clan	37.3	36.7
Adhocracy	16.7	25.8
Market	21.6	18.0
Hierarchy	24.4	19.3

Cameron and Quinn (2011) described a clan culture as friendly and transparent, focused on employee engagement, and with highly committed and loyal employees. The PID embodies an informal sense of community and collaboration, and employees have some degree of autonomy and decision-making authority. Teams generally work well together to achieve departmental and organizational outcomes. This dominant clan culture emphasizes community, collaboration, and mutually supportive relationships, which reflect the biblical principles of maintaining unity in Christ's body, loving one

another, and using one's gifts to serve humanity (*New International Version Bible*, 1973/2013, 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; John 13:34-35; 1 Peter 4:10).

Table 1 shows that the PID's second dominant culture is the hierarchy culture, with the second highest *now* score of 24.4. Cameron and Quinn (2011) described the hierarchy (or control) organizational culture as formalized and structured. This characterization holds for the PID: a Vice President heads the department, and there is a defined chain of command and decision-making authority with a downward communication flow through the department's hierarchical structure.

A key strength of formal organizations is their structure and explicit rules, regulations, policies, procedures, and processes that guide employees' productivity and performance (Gulati & Puranam, 2009). Formal mechanisms guide the PID's operations at all levels and ensure the stability and efficiency necessary to successfully implement development and humanitarian programs. For example, annual budgeting, expense reporting, and auditing processes support the department to steward its finances and remain accountable to its donors and communities. This hierarchy culture aligns with the biblical perspectives of order, accountable stewardship, and good governance (*New International Version Bible*, 1973/2013, 1 Corinthians 14:40; Matthew 25:14-30; 1 Timothy 3: 4-5).

Combining Clan and Hierarchy Cultures Drives Continuous Improvement

Thus, the PID has a strong sense of community and collaboration among employees, a well-defined structure, and clear lines of authority within and across each of its five units. This combination of cooperation and hierarchy allows employees to perform systematically and efficiently using clearly defined standards to achieve programmatic and organizational outcomes. Highly committed staff follow these standards to serve the needs of program participants and fulfill donor requirements. However, regular team-building activities drive employee engagement and foster a sense of family and belonging among department members.

Cultural artifacts such as Wednesday Worship allow followers to integrate their faith and align their professional values with godly standards (*New International Version Bible*, 1973/2013, James 1:5; Matthew 6:33). Well-established traditions such as quarterly food distribution or hosting annual Christmas dinners for underprivileged children demonstrate organizational values of compassion and love and bind employees together in faithful service (*New International Version Bible*, 1973/2013, Psalm 82:3). An organization with a clan culture develops a humane working environment with a management emphasis on empowering employees and facilitating their participation, commitment, and loyalty (Cameron & Quinn, 2011).

PID Leaders as Servants and Stewards

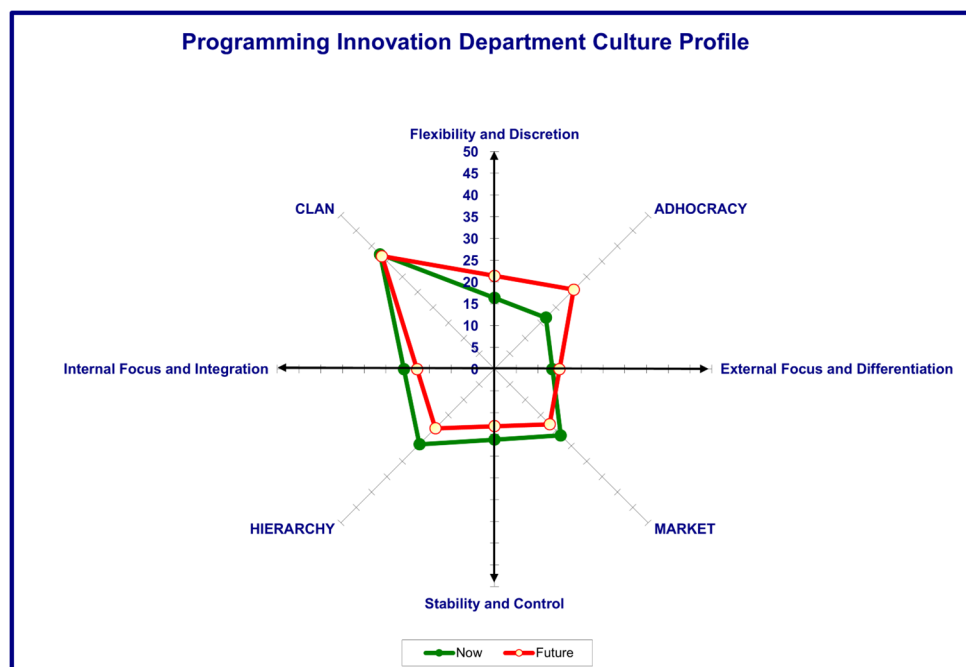
Senge (2006) emphasized that human development and participation produce effectiveness within a clan culture. Within the PID, leaders emphasize coaching and mentoring as preferred follower development strategies. Departmental leaders build strong teams and relationships by nurturing, coaching, and mentoring their staff. PID leaders prioritize their followers' needs and growth, modeled after Jesus' example of servant leadership and His call to nurture and develop others, emphasizing servant leadership and the pursuit of the common good over personal gain (*New International Version Bible*, 1973/2013, Mark 10:43–45; Philippians 2:3–4). Nevertheless, these leaders also maintain the efficiency of programmatic operations by organizing, coordinating, and monitoring their teams. Espoused departmental values such as open communication, individual development, integrity, and continuous improvement align with those of both a clan and hierarchy culture (Cameron & Quinn, 2011).

These findings align with the PID's operational context—designing and implementing relevant, impactful humanitarian and development programs requires high levels of coordination, cohesion, and partnership across a global network of offices. Cameron and Quinn (2011) emphasized that leaders who demonstrate qualities typical of their organization's dominant culture are more successful. Within the PID, leaders who are collaborative team builders with solid organization and planning skills appear to rise faster through the ranks of the organization's leadership.

Bridging the Culture Gap

The comparative analysis in Figure 1 depicts a gap between the PID's actual and desired cultures. Although PID staff are satisfied with the clan culture, they aspire to have a less hierarchical culture and more adhocracy to provide innovative programming and sustainable growth. Employees' aspirations toward a more creative and flexible culture can reflect the Holy Spirit's prompting for new development and transformation within the department (*New International Version Bible*, 1973/2013, Isaiah 43:19). This finding is unsurprising. While departmental leaders tout innovation as a significant value within the department, bureaucratic concerns usually hamper the required experimentation required for demonstrable results. Challenges can arise when an organization's systems and processes, or the behavior of its employees, do not reflect its espoused values (Schein, 2017). Bridging this cultural gap is thus a pivotal step to achieving the PID's programming outcomes.

Figure 1: PID Culture Profile



Note. Average scores are plotted across the internal-external dimension and the stability-flexibility dimension.

The current author believes that the aspiration toward a more adhocratic culture reflects staff concerns about the pressures of an increasingly competitive funding and operational environment. Employees aspire to innovate to meet these pressures while achieving good results for the organization and the communities it serves. Cameron and Quinn (2011) emphasized that an organization must be able to shift cultural emphasis in response to the demands of its competitive environment. However, while it is vital to adapt and innovate, innovation and risk taking must remain grounded in a commitment to God's truth and principles.

Potential Challenges With Moving Toward Adhocracy

The competing values of these dominant cultures could be problematic for culture change within the PID. The PID comprises disparate, specialized functional units with rigid, hierarchical reporting structures and decision-making processes. This hierarchical structure can limit staff relationship building, coordination, and integration between teams, with firmly established rules and regulations making it more difficult for a formal organization to respond to changing operational contexts as efficiently as more informal structures (Blau & Scott, 2015; Gulati & Puranam, 2009). Rigid rules and policies within the PID's hierarchy culture could limit employee willingness and ability

to challenge the established ways of doing things, taking risks, and innovating. Quality strategies in a clan culture, such as empowerment and employee involvement, could directly conflict with those of hierarchy cultures, such as process control, and potentially limit employees' autonomy and decision-making authority.

Another challenge with pivoting to a more adhocratic culture is that departmental staff are from diverse national cultures, potentially leading to different assumptions and subcultures that make agreeing on goals and processes challenging (Schein, 2016). In addition, long-serving employees, particularly those in senior leadership positions, often resist change and adhere firmly to the values and artifacts of the dominant culture (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). Schein (2017) warned that significant culture change only happens when senior management, the culture carriers of an organization's existing culture, are replaced. While dismissing staff arbitrarily is not an acceptable strategy for the PID, a key opportunity is that younger millennial staff are joining the department in increasing numbers. Millennial workers value creativity, inclusivity, and follower development (Anderson et al., 2017). This shift in employee makeup is an advantage for successful culture change within the PID.

From a kingdom perspective, these findings indicate that the current PID culture broadly aligns with biblical principles of community, love for one's neighbor, stewardship, servant leadership, and compassionate care. The aspirational adhocratic culture can potentially enhance the organization's ability to fulfill its mission in ways that honor God and advance His kingdom. However, organizational leaders must ensure that in pursuing innovation and sustainability, the organization remains grounded in kingdom values and continues to prioritize God's purpose over worldly progress.

Building an Adhocratic Culture

While adhocratic cultures drive innovation, hierarchical cultures promote imitation (Büschgens et al., 2013; Naranjo-Valencia et al., 2011). The preceding analysis provided a holistic understanding of how the PID's dominant clan and hierarchical cultures limit innovation. The study also identified aspirational adhocratic attributes that would allow the organization to align its culture with the strategic goal of driving innovation to enhance its competitive advantage. Nevertheless, culture change requires involvement, commitment, and active support throughout an organization, and a compelling vision helps align and inspire actions toward change (Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Kotter, 2012). The next section includes recommendations for PID leaders to drive innovation by transforming organizational culture. With these proposed steps, leaders can move their organization toward a more balanced and influential culture that serves its current needs while preparing it to respond to ever-evolving operational environments.

Leaders Set the Tone for Change

To develop or reinforce an adhocracy culture, an organization must have a designated change agent to facilitate transformational change that renews the organization (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). A crucial first step for these leaders seeking to transform their organization's culture using the OCAI is thus to convene the organization's leadership, employees, and key stakeholders to discuss and validate OCAI results. These stakeholders will then jointly develop a clear vision of an adhocracy culture that promotes experimentation, innovation, and risk taking to drive growth.

Kotter (2012) emphasized the importance of communicating a vision that clearly articulates the benefits of change. Working with an organization's senior leadership and key influencers to communicate this agreed-upon vision and attending strategies to all employees and stakeholders emphasizes the benefits and sets the scene for successful change management. Illustrative stories that convey the desired values and culture are powerful tools for sharing a well-articulated vision (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). Regular communication, encouragement, and support from organizational leaders can ensure that all stakeholders understand and support the vision of an adhocracy culture.

Leaders model desired behaviors and must adapt them to change organizational culture (Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Drucker et al., 2015). Organizational leaders can build relevant change management competencies to support the necessary behavior change, such as leading the future through innovation and change and managing continuous improvement (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). Intentionally strengthening their change competencies demonstrates a firm commitment that will inspire employees across all levels to embrace change.

Engaging Stakeholders Limits Opposition to Change

Reaching stakeholder consensus is necessary to minimize resistance (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). Identifying and gaining consensus around the values, strategies, and activities required to support a planned transition is critical for successful change. Kotter and Schlesinger (2008) suggested helpful strategies for leaders to prepare for and overcome resistance to change, such as diagnosing the type of resistance one will likely encounter and selecting from a mix of education, participation, facilitation, and negotiation strategies to secure employee buy-in for the proposed transition. Anchoring these activities with specific examples and verifiable data helps to ensure that proposed changes are grounded in evidence (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). Prioritizing employee engagement and buy-in to the change process are thus crucial for successful organizational culture change.

Psychological Safety Promotes Experimentation

An adhocracy culture requires creativity, and followers must be comfortable proposing and testing new ideas without fear of failure or negative repercussions. Teams engage in innovative behavior when support for risk taking and tolerance for mistakes is present (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2012). The department's leaders must encourage followers to experiment and take risks while tolerating initial mistakes. Innovation improves effectiveness within an adhocracy; therefore, learning from failure is critical. To sustain a culture of continuous learning, INGO leaders should implement initiatives that allow work teams to discuss and use the learning from unsuccessful initiatives to adapt and improve, as well as prioritize resources for implementing pilot initiatives that will enable employees to learn through experimentation.

Measure Change Progress

Organizational leaders are responsible for determining key performance metrics and ensuring meaningful results (Drucker et al., 2015). Therefore, a key focus for PID leaders during change management efforts is to measure progress regularly to assess the effectiveness of any transition. Leaders can track metrics such as the proportion of newly designed or adapted initiatives to evaluate progress and adjust change management strategies toward an adhocracy culture as required. Change efforts can lose momentum without short-term goals to celebrate (Kotter, 2012). These results help departmental leaders select initial small wins to promote as a motivator for employee engagement and innovation. In addition, Cameron and Quinn (2011) highlighted the importance of cultural congruence within an organization in which organizational elements, such as strategy, leadership style, reward system, and human resources approach, all promote the same cultural values. Leaders can motivate staff toward implementing culture change by ensuring an appropriate rewards system for knowledge sharing, collaboration, learning, and innovative behavior.

Conclusion

The PID currently blends two primary cultures – the clan and the hierarchy cultures. The department's friendly working environment illustrates the clan culture, which promotes collaboration, teamwork, engagement, and consensus. Formal mechanisms that guide the PID's operations at all levels and ensure stability and efficiency depict the department's hierarchy culture. Supportive PID leaders empower and develop their staff while maintaining efficiency through stringent programming and operational standards. Followers are highly committed to working together to meet the needs of global program participants and fulfill donor requirements.

Employees aspire to an adhocracy culture that allows them to innovate and meet the demands of an increasingly constrained funding and operational development environment. The competing values of these dominant cultures and the resistance of long-serving staff present challenges for building an adhocracy culture. Nevertheless, the growing number of millennial employees who value innovation, creativity, and flexibility is an advantage for culture change within the PID.

The PID's current culture aligns with kingdom culture values of loving one another, unity in Christ, servant leadership, compassionate care, and effective stewardship of entrusted resources. The aspirational adhocratic culture can allow the department to honor God while fulfilling its mandate. PID leaders must develop a clear adhocracy vision and relevant strategies and activities in collaboration with all stakeholders to support the change toward an adhocracy culture. Departmental leaders must anticipate and plan for resistance and monitor appropriate metrics to determine progress. To lead culture change, these leaders must strengthen their change management skills, adapt organizational systems for practical experimentation, and reduce barriers to risk taking. Finally, PID leaders must ensure that change management strategies and innovations align with God's purpose for humankind.

About the Author

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Strengthening Africa's Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Through Kingdom Business Approaches: Building a Collaborative Ecosystem Model That Works

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Abstract

Africa's youthful population presents both opportunities and challenges for the continent's economic development. With a median age of 19 and 10-12 million youth entering the workforce annually, the gap between available jobs and new entrants is substantial, with only 3.1 million formal positions accessible each year (African Development Bank, 2020). Compounding this issue, approximately 72 million African youth are categorized as NEET (not in employment, education, or training), creating significant obstacles to economic stability and growth (International Labour Organization, 2020). Addressing these challenges requires innovative approaches that integrate ethical and values-driven frameworks into entrepreneurial ecosystems in African contexts, especially to inspire and mentor the development of ethical business practices incorporating Kingdom Business values. The researchers explored how Kingdom Business approaches – rooted in ethical values, stewardship, and holistic development – can enhance Africa's entrepreneurship ecosystem based on a Global Skills Factory collaborative ecosystem model embedding Kingdom Business principles at every stage to foster a more supportive environment for ethical business practices among young entrepreneurs. Our methodology involves a thorough analysis of existing ecosystem components, including entrepreneur training, coaching, and mentorship in addition to access to finance and market linkages, while integrating Kingdom Business

values training to address these issues (with focused case studies of Regent Center for Entrepreneurship's Business Development Center and Global Skills Factory Oy).

Keywords: Africa's entrepreneurship ecosystem, collaborative entrepreneurship ecosystem model, ecosystem support organizations (ESO), entrepreneurial support frameworks, Kingdom Business approaches

Introduction

Background

Africa's entrepreneurship landscape is shaped by a dynamic combination of challenges and opportunities, driven primarily by its youthful population. With a median age of just 19, Africa has one of the world's youngest populations, making it a potential powerhouse for economic growth. Every year, an estimated 10 to 12 million young people enter the labor market with only 3.1 million formal jobs available to meet this demand, creating a significant employment gap (African Development Bank [AfDB], 2020). This imbalance has contributed to a growing number of youth being categorized as NEET (not in employment, education, or training), which now stands at over 72 million young adults across the continent (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2020). This situation represents both a challenge and a unique opportunity for fostering entrepreneurship as a viable path to economic empowerment and job creation.

Entrepreneurship, particularly among young adults, is seen as a critical solution to the unemployment crisis in Africa. Many African state governments, private-sector organizations, and development agencies have recognized the potential of entrepreneurship to drive economic diversification and innovation. However, significant obstacles persist, including limited access to finance, lack of mentorship and training, and fragmented market linkages (Dawa, 2019). These challenges often prevent young entrepreneurs from scaling up their businesses and contributing meaningfully to the economy.

In response to these challenges, the integration of ethical and values-driven frameworks, such as Kingdom Business principles, in Africa's entrepreneurial ecosystem presents a promising pathway forward. Kingdom Business approaches are grounded in biblical principles of ethical stewardship, integrity, and holistic community development. By fostering an entrepreneurial mindset that prioritizes not only profit but also societal well-being, Kingdom Business models can address systemic issues that hinder sustainable business development in Africa.

Kingdom Business principles, which emphasize values such as integrity, excellence, and spirit-led innovation, offer a framework for ethical entrepreneurship. These principles not only help entrepreneurs build sustainable businesses but also contribute to the broader community by addressing social and economic issues through values-based leadership (Brantley, 2021). The integration of these approaches in Africa's entrepreneurship ecosystem can lead to a more collaborative, supportive, and ethical environment, fostering long-term economic growth and stability.

This paper explores the potential of Kingdom Business approaches to strengthen Africa's entrepreneurial ecosystem by addressing the current gaps and offering a values-driven model. Through a case study analysis of initiatives that have successfully incorporated Kingdom Business principles, this study presents a collaborative model designed to create a thriving entrepreneurial environment for young entrepreneurs in Africa.

Problem Statement – Gaps in the Entrepreneurship Ecosystem

Despite Africa's vast potential for economic development through entrepreneurship, the continent's entrepreneurship ecosystem remains underdeveloped and faces numerous challenges. The mismatch between the high number of young adults entering the workforce annually and the limited availability of formal employment opportunities creates a significant burden on the economy. With over 72 million young adults categorized as NEET in Africa, the traditional approaches to job creation and entrepreneurship support have proven insufficient in bridging this gap (ILO, 2020). This employment deficit not only stifles individual prosperity but also hampers broader economic growth and social stability across the continent.

Existing entrepreneurship ecosystems in Africa are plagued by various barriers, including limited access to finance, inadequate mentorship, fragmented markets, and insufficient support from government and private-sector actors (Dawa, 2019). Moreover, while many entrepreneurship development initiatives have emerged in recent years, they often lack a coherent ethical framework to guide sustainable and socially responsible business growth. Without a values-driven approach, many entrepreneurial ventures struggle to balance profit making with societal impact, leading to unsustainable growth and missed opportunities for long-term development.

The integration of Kingdom Business approaches, such as those suggested by Brantley (2021), are anchored in ethical principles such as integrity, stewardship, and positive community impact and present a promising solution to these challenges. However, there is limited research on how these values-driven principles can be systematically incorporated into Africa's entrepreneurship ecosystem to foster holistic growth. This gap in the literature suggests the need for a model that combines ethical business

practices with collaborative support structures, aimed at nurturing young entrepreneurs who prioritize both economic success and societal well-being. The current research sought to address this gap by examining how Kingdom Business principles can be embedded in Africa's entrepreneurship ecosystem to create a more supportive, ethical, and collaborative environment for young entrepreneur enterprises. Specifically, it aims to develop a model that aligns entrepreneurship support frameworks with Kingdom Business values, fostering not only business success but also community development and economic sustainability.

Research Questions

To achieve the purpose of this study, the following research questions guided the researchers' exploration of how Kingdom Business principles can enhance Africa's entrepreneurship ecosystem:

RQ1: What are the key challenges faced by young entrepreneurs in Africa's current entrepreneurial ecosystem? This question aims to identify the systemic barriers and limitations that hinder the growth and sustainability of young entrepreneur enterprises in Africa.

RQ2: How can Kingdom Business principles be effectively integrated into existing entrepreneurial support frameworks in Africa? This question seeks to explore the methods and strategies for embedding ethical values, stewardship, and positive community impact into the entrepreneurship ecosystem to create a more supportive environment for young entrepreneurs.

RQ3: What successful case studies exist that demonstrate the application of Kingdom Business principles in enhancing entrepreneurship in African contexts? This question aims to analyze specific initiatives that have successfully implemented Kingdom Business approaches, drawing lessons and best practices that can be replicated across the continent.

RQ4: What collaborative ecosystem model can be developed that incorporates Kingdom Business principles at every stage of entrepreneur development? This question focuses on designing a comprehensive model that integrates ethical business practices, mentorship, financing, and market linkages to support entrepreneurship holistically.

RQ5: What practical recommendations can be made for governments, private-sector actors, and ecosystem support organizations to promote Kingdom Business values in their entrepreneurial support initiatives? This question aims to provide actionable insights for various stakeholders to enhance the effectiveness of their efforts in supporting young entrepreneurs and promoting sustainable economic growth.

Significance of the Study

This study holds significant importance for multiple stakeholders within Africa's entrepreneurial landscape, including policymakers, business leaders, educational institutions, and organizations that provide training and support for entrepreneurs, as well as the aspiring young entrepreneurs themselves in Africa. By focusing on the integration of Kingdom Business principles into the entrepreneurial ecosystem, the research contributes to several key areas:

- **Addressing youth unemployment:** By exploring innovative solutions to the challenges faced by young entrepreneurs, this study sought to provide actionable insights that can help reduce youth unemployment rates across the continent. The findings could guide the development of more effective support frameworks that empower young entrepreneurs to create sustainable businesses, ultimately, contributing to economic stability.
- **Promoting ethical entrepreneurship:** The study emphasizes the need for a values-driven approach to entrepreneurship, advocating for ethical business practices that align profit making with ethical, values-driven social responsibility. By highlighting the importance of Kingdom Business principles, this research encourages the emergence of businesses that prioritize integrity, stewardship, and positive community impact, fostering a more ethically grounded business culture in African states where these principles are adopted and practiced to strengthen the entrepreneurship ecosystem.
- **Enhancing collaborative networks:** The research aims to develop a collaborative ecosystem model that facilitates partnerships among various stakeholders, including governments, private-sector actors, and ecosystem support organizations (ESO). By promoting collaboration, the study sought to create a more interconnected and supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem, enhancing resource sharing, mentorship opportunities, and market access for young entrepreneur enterprises.
- **Informing policy and practice:** It is hoped that the findings of this study can provide valuable recommendations for policymakers and practitioners focused on enhancing the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Integrating Kingdom Business principles into policy frameworks and support initiatives based on the model proposed in this study can help shape strategies that align economic development with ethical standards, promoting sustainable growth in African economies.
- **Contributing to academic discourse:** This study adds to the existing body of literature on entrepreneurship in Africa by exploring the intersection of ethical values and business practices. It serves as a foundation for further research on Kingdom Business approaches and their potential to transform the

entrepreneurial landscape, encouraging more scholars to examine the impact of values-driven entrepreneurship.

Literature Review

Africa's Entrepreneurial Landscape

Africa's entrepreneurial landscape is characterized by a unique blend of opportunities and challenges that shape the experiences of entrepreneurs across the continent. With a rapidly growing youthful population, Africa presents significant potential for economic development through entrepreneurship. However, this potential is often hampered by systemic barriers that hinder the growth of entrepreneurial ventures.

Youth Demographics and Economic Potential. As previously mentioned, Africa has one of the youngest populations globally, with a median age of 19 years (AfDB, 2020). This demographic trend provides an unprecedented opportunity for economic growth, as approximately 10 to 12 million young people enter the workforce each year. However, the existing job market can only absorb about 3.1 million of these individuals, resulting in a substantial employment gap that fuels the crisis of young adults categorized as NEET (ILO, 2020). This mismatch between job seekers and available positions underscores the urgent need for innovative solutions that leverage entrepreneurship as a pathway to economic empowerment.

Challenges Facing Entrepreneurs. Despite the apparent opportunities, several challenges plague the entrepreneurial landscape in Africa:

- **Access to finances:** Limited access to financing remains one of the most significant barriers for entrepreneurs in Africa. Traditional banking systems often impose stringent requirements that many young entrepreneurs cannot meet, leading to a reliance on informal lending sources or personal savings (Osei & Ofori, 2020). This lack of access inhibits the ability to start or scale businesses effectively.
- **Inadequate support structures:** The entrepreneurial ecosystem in many African countries lacks the necessary support structures, such as mentorship programs and training initiatives, which can nurture aspiring entrepreneurs (Dawa, 2019). Without proper guidance, many young entrepreneurs struggle to navigate the complexities of starting and running a business.
- **Fragmented market linkages:** Many African markets are characterized by fragmentation, with limited access to broader markets for small and medium enterprises (SMEs). This fragmentation can lead to reduced competitiveness and profitability for young entrepreneur ventures (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa [UNECA], 2019).

- **Regulatory challenges:** The regulatory environment in many African countries can be cumbersome with bureaucratic hurdles that complicate business registration and operation (World Bank, 2020). These regulatory challenges can deter potential entrepreneurs from formalizing their ventures, perpetuating the cycle of informal entrepreneurship.

The Role of Entrepreneurship in Economic Development. Despite the challenges elaborated previously, entrepreneurship is increasingly recognized as a vital component of economic development in Africa. As affirmed by researchers, entrepreneurs contribute to job creation, innovation, and economic diversification, which are essential for sustainable growth (Global Entrepreneurship Research Association, 2017). Entrepreneurial ventures can address social issues by providing goods and services that meet local needs, thereby enhancing community resilience. The growing recognition of the potential for entrepreneurship in Africa has led to various initiatives aimed at fostering a supportive ecosystem. These initiatives often focus on enhancing access to finance, providing training and mentorship, and creating platforms for networking and collaboration (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2020). However, for these efforts to be truly effective, they must also incorporate ethical, values-driven frameworks that guide entrepreneurs toward sustainable and responsible practices.

Challenges in Africa's Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

Africa's entrepreneurial ecosystem faces several critical challenges that hinder the potential of emerging entrepreneurs, particularly the youth. These challenges include job scarcity, limited access to finance, insufficient mentorship opportunities, and fragmented market access. Additionally, the socioeconomic context, marked by a significant NEET population, exacerbates these issues.

- **Job scarcity and economic constraints:** The high rate of unemployment among young adults in Africa is one of the most pressing challenges confronting the continent. With millions entering the job market annually and only a fraction finding formal employment, many young people are left without viable career options. The lack of job opportunities not only leads to economic instability but also contributes to social unrest and disenfranchisement (ILO, 2020). As young people increasingly seek alternatives to traditional employment, entrepreneurship emerges as a promising solution. However, the structural barriers within the entrepreneurial ecosystem can stifle this potential.
- **Limited access to finances:** Access to finances is a significant hurdle for young entrepreneurs in Africa who lack the credit history or collateral required to secure loans from traditional financial institutions (Osei & Ofori, 2020). As a result, aspiring entrepreneurs often rely on informal lending sources, which can

impose high interest rates and unfavorable terms. This lack of financing options limits entrepreneurs' ability to start or expand their ventures, leading to a reliance on personal savings that may not be sufficient to sustain growth. A World Bank report (Choi et al., 2020) also pointed to the lack of access to formal credit as one of the key barriers for entrepreneurs in sub-Saharan Africa.

- **Insufficient mentorship and support structures:** Inadequate mentorship and support systems further complicate the entrepreneurial landscape. Many young entrepreneurs enter the market without the necessary guidance or training to navigate the complexities of business ownership. Without access to mentorship programs or training initiatives, aspiring entrepreneurs struggle to develop the essential skills and knowledge required for success (Dawa, 2019). The lack of structured support can lead to high failure rates among new ventures, discouraging potential entrepreneurs from pursuing their business aspirations.
- **Fragmented market access:** The fragmented nature of African markets presents additional challenges for youth entrepreneurs. Many SMEs face difficulties accessing broader markets due to poor infrastructure, regulatory barriers, and lack of networking opportunities (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa [UNECA], 2019). This fragmentation reduces the competitiveness of young entrepreneurs and limits their ability to scale their businesses effectively. Additionally, the challenges of navigating complex supply chains and market dynamics can deter young adults from pursuing entrepreneurship altogether.
- **Socioeconomic challenges and the NEET population:** The socioeconomic context in Africa further complicates the entrepreneurial landscape. With over 72 million young people classified in the NEET population who are not participating in the workforce or education, often due to socioeconomic barriers such as poverty, lack of access to quality education, and social exclusion, the continent faces a significant challenge in engaging this demographic (ILO, 2020). This demographic is at a heightened risk of being marginalized, and entrepreneurship could serve as a viable pathway to reintegrating these young individuals into productive economic activities and livelihoods.

Overview of Kingdom Business Approaches

Kingdom Business approaches represent a transformative framework for entrepreneurship that integrates ethical principles and values into business practices. These approaches are rooted in the belief that businesses can be conduits for positive societal change while also achieving financial success. The Kingdom Business framework can be categorized into three stages: 1) values-centered, 2) excellence-minded, and 3) Spirit-led. Each of these stages, as described in this section, builds upon the previous one, contributing to a holistic approach to ethical business practices that fosters entrepreneurial growth (Brantley, 2021).

Exploration of Kingdom Business Principles.

1. *Values-Centered Business:* The foundation of the Kingdom Business approach begins with the values-centered stage, which emphasizes the importance of integrating biblical values – such as integrity, honesty, and compassion – into business operations. Businesses that define themselves by these values are more likely to create a culture of trust and ethical behavior among employees, customers, and stakeholders (Brantley, 2021). However, merely having values is not sufficient for a business to thrive; it requires the practical application of these values in everyday operations.
2. *Excellence-Minded Business:* Building on the values-centered business foundation, the excellence-minded stage focuses on operational excellence and high-quality execution. In this stage, businesses prioritize delivering exceptional products and services that meet market demands while maintaining ethical standards. Excellence-minded businesses are adept at understanding customer needs and creating innovative solutions (Brantley, 2021). This focus on excellence not only enhances customer satisfaction but also helps to differentiate the business in a competitive marketplace.
3. *Spirit-Led Business:* The pinnacle of the Kingdom Business approach is the Spirit-led stage, where entrepreneurs actively seek Divine guidance in their business decisions. This stage encourages leaders to engage with their faith actively and to be open to inspiration that can lead to innovative solutions to pressing societal problems (Brantley, 2021). Spirit-led entrepreneurs view their businesses as a form of ministry, striving to make a positive impact in their communities while achieving sustainable financial success. This stage emphasizes creativity and responsiveness to the changing needs of the market, allowing businesses to adapt and grow in dynamic environments.

Impact on Entrepreneurial Growth.

The Kingdom Business framework has significant implications for entrepreneurial growth. By integrating ethical principles and values at every stage of business development, entrepreneurs can foster a more supportive and sustainable ecosystem. Following are some key impacts:

- **Enhanced reputation and trust:** Businesses that adhere to Kingdom Business principles often enjoy higher levels of trust and loyalty from customers and stakeholders. This enhanced reputation can lead to increased customer retention, positive word-of-mouth referrals, and, ultimately, greater profitability (Brantley, 2021).
- **Holistic development:** The focus on ethical practices and community impact encourages entrepreneurs to consider the broader implications of their business

decisions. This holistic approach not only benefits the entrepreneurs but also contributes to the overall well-being of the communities they serve, leading to sustainable growth.

- **Innovation and adaptability:** The spirit-led stage fosters an environment of creativity and adaptability, empowering entrepreneurs to respond to emerging challenges and opportunities. This innovation can drive new business models, products, and services that meet the evolving needs of the market, positioning these entrepreneurs for long-term success.
- **Collaboration and networking:** Kingdom Business approaches promote collaboration among entrepreneurs, which can lead to the establishment of supportive networks and partnerships. These networks facilitate knowledge sharing, resource access, and mentorship opportunities, which are crucial for the growth of young entrepreneurs in Africa.

Ethical Business Practices and Entrepreneurship

Ethical business practices are essential for fostering sustainable business models and ensuring long-term success in entrepreneurship. The principles of stewardship, integrity, and positive community impact play a crucial role in shaping these practices. By integrating Kingdom Business values into their operations, entrepreneurs can create businesses that are not only profitable but also socially responsible.

Significance of Stewardship, Integrity, and Community Impact

Stewardship refers to the responsible management of resources, both human and financial, for the benefit of stakeholders and the community at large. In the context of Kingdom Business, stewardship involves recognizing that business owners are caretakers of their resources and must use them wisely to create value for others (Brantley, 2021). This mindset encourages entrepreneurs to make decisions that prioritize sustainability and ethical considerations, fostering a culture of accountability and transparency. By practicing stewardship, businesses can enhance their reputation and build trust with customers, employees, and investors.

Integrity is a foundational element of ethical business practices. Businesses that operate with integrity demonstrate honesty and consistency in their dealings with stakeholders, which fosters trust and loyalty. For entrepreneurs, maintaining integrity can lead to better relationships with customers, suppliers, and partners, ultimately, contributing to the business's long-term success (Osei & Ofori, 2020). Integrity not only enhances a company's reputation but also attracts talent and customers who value ethical practices, creating a competitive advantage in the marketplace.

Community impact extends beyond a business's immediate economic contributions; it also encompasses the broader effects on the community and environment.

Entrepreneurs who prioritize community impact are more likely to engage in corporate social responsibility initiatives, which can improve their business's social license to operate. By investing in community development and addressing social issues, businesses can create a positive feedback loop that enhances their brand image and builds customer loyalty (Dawa, 2019). Moreover, community-oriented practices can lead to innovative solutions that address local challenges, further strengthening the business's role within the ecosystem.

Theoretical Framework

Kingdom Business Model as a Theoretical Lens

The Kingdom Business model serves as a robust theoretical framework for understanding and analyzing the interplay between ethical principles and entrepreneurial practices. This essence of our theoretical framework is anchored in three key dimensions: values-driven approaches, stewardship, and spirit-led innovation. An exploration by researchers (Brantley, 2021; Osei & Ofori, 2020) illustrates how these elements contribute to building sustainable business practices:

1. At the core of the Kingdom Business Model lies the emphasis on **values-driven approaches**. This dimension asserts that successful businesses must operate on a foundation of ethical values derived from both biblical teachings and culturally relevant principles. These values – such as integrity, honesty, and respect – guide decision-making processes and shape organizational culture. Businesses that prioritize values not only enhance their internal cohesion but also foster trust with stakeholders, which is critical for long-term success (Brantley, 2021). This values-centric approach encourages entrepreneurs to reflect on their motivations and align their business objectives with ethical considerations, creating a framework for responsible entrepreneurship.
2. **Stewardship** is another critical aspect of the Kingdom Business model. It embodies the principle that entrepreneurs are not merely owners of their businesses but also caretakers of resources entrusted to them by their communities and stakeholders. This perspective encourages responsible and ethical management of financial, human, and environmental resources (Osei & Ofori, 2020). Entrepreneurs who practice stewardship are more likely to engage in sustainable practices, considering the broader implications of their business decisions. This commitment to stewardship fosters accountability and encourages businesses to invest in their communities, further enhancing their social impact.

3. The third dimension of the Kingdom Business model is **Spirit-led innovation**, which emphasizes the role of divine guidance and inspiration in entrepreneurship. This aspect of the framework posits that entrepreneurs can achieve greater success by seeking spiritual insight into the challenges and opportunities they face. By being open to the leading of the Holy Spirit, entrepreneurs are encouraged to innovate and create solutions that address real societal needs (Brantley, 2021). This spirit-led approach not only facilitates the development of unique business models but also aligns entrepreneurial efforts with a higher purpose, thus fostering a sense of fulfillment and commitment among business leaders.

The Kingdom Business model provides a comprehensive theoretical lens through which to analyze ethical entrepreneurship in the African context. The previously highlighted research findings have proven it true that entrepreneurs who embrace these principles are positioned to create sustainable, impactful enterprises that resonate with the ethical expectations of their communities and stakeholders. This theoretical framework is particularly relevant within the African entrepreneurial ecosystem context that does not include the aforementioned Kingdom Business values in the way it operates, thus resulting in unethical, self-serving entrepreneurs unable to drive holistic national transformation.

Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Theory

Entrepreneurial ecosystem theory provides a framework for understanding the interconnected components that foster entrepreneurial activity within a specific environment. This theory emphasizes the importance of relationships, resources, and support systems that influence the growth and sustainability of startups and small businesses. In the context of Kingdom Business, the integration of ethical, values-driven practices enhances the robustness of the entrepreneurial ecosystem by aligning economic activities with moral and social responsibilities. The key components of entrepreneurial ecosystem theory are as follow:

- **Interconnected actors:** At the heart of the entrepreneurial ecosystem are various actors, including entrepreneurs, investors, mentors, educational institutions, and government agencies. Each of these stakeholders plays a vital role in facilitating or hindering entrepreneurial success. The Kingdom Business approach encourages these actors to operate based on ethical principles, fostering collaboration and mutual support. When all participants prioritize values-driven practices, the ecosystem becomes more resilient and supportive, enabling entrepreneurs to thrive (Isenberg, 2010).
- **Resources and support systems:** The availability of resources – such as access to finance, mentorship, and market opportunities – is crucial for entrepreneurial

success. Kingdom Business principles advocate for the responsible management of these resources, emphasizing stewardship and community impact. For example, investors who adopt Kingdom Business values may prioritize funding for ventures that not only promise financial returns but also demonstrate social responsibility and ethical practices (Osei & Ofori, 2020). This shift in focus can lead to a more equitable distribution of resources and support, fostering an environment where ethical entrepreneurship flourishes.

- **Cultural norms and values:** The cultural context of an entrepreneurial ecosystem significantly influences the behaviors and attitudes of its participants. In ecosystems that embrace Kingdom Business principles, there is a strong emphasis on ethical conduct, integrity, and community engagement. These cultural norms encourage entrepreneurs to adopt practices that align with their values, thereby creating a more cohesive and supportive ecosystem (Stam, 2015). A culture rooted in ethical practices not only enhances trust among stakeholders but also attracts talent and customers who share similar values, further strengthening the ecosystem.
- **Innovation and adaptability:** Kingdom Business approaches encourage innovation that is both ethically sound and socially responsible. In an entrepreneurial ecosystem, this innovation manifests as solutions to pressing societal challenges, aligning business goals with community needs. Entrepreneurs who are guided by ethical principles are more likely to identify opportunities that lead to sustainable development, which is essential for the long-term viability of the ecosystem (Brantley, 2021). This adaptability to changing circumstances, grounded in values-driven practices, ensures that the ecosystem can respond effectively to emerging challenges.

The entrepreneurial ecosystem theory, when viewed through the lens of Kingdom Business, emphasizes the importance of ethical, values-driven practices in nurturing a vibrant entrepreneurial environment. In the African context, researchers recognize that several actions are to be taken into consideration to shape a better collaborative model that addresses the highlighted gaps necessitating the embedment of kingdom principles, including connecting interconnected actors, optimizing accountability in resource allocation and use, nurturing supportive cultural norms, and encouraging responsible innovation. This integrated approach can significantly enhance the sustainability and impact of entrepreneurship in Africa.

Synthesis of Theories

The integration of Kingdom Business principles with entrepreneurial ecosystem theory provides a comprehensive framework for developing an ethical, collaborative ecosystem model tailored to the unique challenges and opportunities in African settings. This synthesis not only addresses the immediate needs of entrepreneurs but

also promotes long-term sustainability and social responsibility within the entrepreneurial landscape.

- **Bridging values and ecosystem dynamics:** At the core of this synthesis is the recognition that the values-driven nature of Kingdom Business principles can significantly enhance the dynamics of entrepreneurial ecosystems. By embedding ethical considerations into every facet of the ecosystem – ranging from funding mechanisms to mentorship programs – stakeholders can cultivate an environment that prioritizes moral integrity alongside economic growth. This alignment fosters trust among participants, encouraging collaboration and collective problem solving (Brantley, 2021).
- **Promoting ethical stewardship:** Incorporating stewardship into the entrepreneurial ecosystem emphasizes the importance of responsible resource management. Kingdom Business advocates for entrepreneurs to act as stewards of their communities, focusing on the broader social impact of their businesses. This principle aligns with ecosystem theory, which highlights the interconnectedness of various actors and the need for sustainable practices. By prioritizing ethical stewardship, entrepreneurs can create businesses that not only thrive economically but also contribute positively to their communities, thereby enhancing overall ecosystem resilience (Osei & Ofori, 2020).
- **Encouraging spirit-led innovation:** The synthesis of Kingdom Business and entrepreneurial ecosystem theory also promotes the concept of spirit-led innovation. This approach encourages entrepreneurs to seek divine guidance in their business ventures, fostering creativity and adaptability. In African contexts, where traditional practices and cultural values play a significant role, this aspect of the synthesis can lead to innovative solutions that resonate deeply with local communities. By integrating spiritual insights into their entrepreneurial strategies, business leaders can identify opportunities that address pressing societal issues, ensuring their relevance and sustainability (Isenberg, 2010).
- **Collaborative networks and community engagement:** A key outcome of synthesizing these theories is the establishment of collaborative networks that support ethical business practices. Kingdom Business principles emphasize community engagement, urging entrepreneurs to actively involve their communities in decision-making processes. This engagement not only strengthens the social fabric of the ecosystem but also ensures that business practices align with local needs and values. By fostering collaboration among various ecosystem actors – such as government entities, educational institutions, and civil society organizations – this model enhances the support available to entrepreneurs, facilitating their growth and impact (Stam, 2015).

Methodology

This research employed a comprehensive methodology that combined a literature-based approach, focused case study analysis, and conceptual model development to examine how Kingdom Business principles can enhance Africa's entrepreneurship ecosystem through a collaborative ecosystem framework. The literature-based approach provided an in-depth review of existing scholarship on entrepreneurial ecosystems, ethical business models, and Kingdom Business principles. This desk research involved systematically gathering and analyzing insights from academic journals, books, and credible sources that address the intersection of ethics, entrepreneurship, and Kingdom principles. Through this process, the study identified core theoretical frameworks, common challenges, and best practices relevant to the African entrepreneurship ecosystem (Osei & Ofori, 2020; Teece, 2018).

Following the theoretical review, a case study analysis was conducted to explore practical applications of Kingdom Business principles within the African entrepreneurship landscape. The Business Development Center (BDC) with Regent Center for Entrepreneurship and Global Skills Factory Oy were selected as focal cases for their demonstrated success in integrating values-based entrepreneurship practices. This analysis provided concrete examples of how Kingdom Business principles can be applied to promote ethical, community-focused entrepreneurship, offering valuable insights into the specific methods and outcomes associated with this approach (Global Skills Factory, 2024; Habinshuti, 2024). Building upon the theoretical and case study findings, this research culminated in the development of a collaborative ecosystem model, designed to integrate Kingdom Business principles into African entrepreneurial support system. This model emphasized a holistic approach to entrepreneurship support, including values-based training, mentorship, access to finance, and market linkages, with the aim of fostering a sustainable and ethically grounded entrepreneurship ecosystem. Through this structured approach, the study presents a replicable framework that may serve as a foundation for future initiatives seeking to incorporate Kingdom Business values within diverse African entrepreneurial settings.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings from the literature review and case studies, focusing on the gaps identified within the current African entrepreneurial ecosystem. These identified gaps presented in this section highlight the challenges faced by entrepreneurs and the opportunities for integrating Kingdom Business principles to foster a more supportive environment.

Review of Ecosystem Gaps

RQ1: What are the key challenges faced by youth entrepreneurs in Africa's current entrepreneurial ecosystem?

The analysis of the African entrepreneurial ecosystem reveals several significant gaps that hinder the growth and sustainability of youth-led enterprises. These gaps were identified through a comprehensive review of literature and case studies, illustrating the complex landscape in which African entrepreneurs operate. The findings from this research reveal several key challenges in Africa's entrepreneurial landscape, notably inadequate entrepreneur support, limited access to finance, market fragmentation, and regulatory barriers. The underlying reasons for these issues can often be traced to broader systemic shortcomings within the entrepreneurial ecosystem, including a lack of values-based, structured support systems, an unfavorable financing landscape, and complex regulatory processes. These issues hinder the growth and potential of young entrepreneurs, particularly those lacking access to ethical mentorship, financial support, or inclusive market opportunities (see Table 1).

Table 1: Summary of Key Challenges in the African Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

Key gaps	Findings
Inadequate entrepreneur support	One critical challenge lies in the limited availability of structured training and mentorship programs rooted in values-based principles. Studies indicate that effective entrepreneurial development requires mentorship and training programs that emphasize not only technical skills but also ethical principles and community impact. However, most programs are focused on profit maximization and lack an emphasis on ethical business conduct, creating a gap in fostering entrepreneurs who can contribute positively to social transformation. This gap often results in entrepreneurs who prioritize self-interest over broader societal impact, inhibiting sustainable economic development and ethical business growth (Osei & Ofori, 2020).
Access to finance	Access to finance remains a persistent challenge, as few financial institutions prioritize young entrepreneurs, especially those operating in sectors where ethical or socially responsible business practices might result in lower immediate profitability. Researchers have highlighted that conventional financing models, largely focused on profit, often overlook the social impact potential of entrepreneurship, which discourages the development of values-based ventures (Halverson, 2021). Consequently, many aspiring entrepreneurs, especially those committed to ethical or

Key gaps	Findings
Fragmented market linkages	<p>community-centered business models, struggle to secure funding, which limits the reach and potential impact of their ventures (Teece, 2018).</p> <p>The lack of effective market linkages is another critical gap in the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Entrepreneurs often struggle to connect with potential customers, suppliers, and distribution networks, which limits their ability to grow and sustain their businesses. The fragmented nature of market linkages in many African countries results in missed opportunities for collaboration and resource sharing. This fragmentation can be attributed to a combination of infrastructural challenges, regulatory barriers, and insufficient networking platforms (Acs, 2019). As a result, entrepreneurs find it difficult to penetrate markets and scale their operations, further exacerbating the challenges they face.</p>
Regulatory barriers	<p>The complex and often time-consuming processes for business formalization create significant regulatory barriers that deter many young entrepreneurs from entering the formal market. Studies have suggested that overly bureaucratic regulatory frameworks can discourage entrepreneurs, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, from legitimizing their businesses (Klapper et al., 2006). Furthermore, research has noted that business environments lacking ethical and values-based regulatory practices are prone to corruption, making it more challenging for entrepreneurs to operate transparently and fairly (Klapper & Love, 2011). As a result, the system often inadvertently promotes unethical, self-serving business practices, as entrepreneurs navigate through processes that prioritize profit over positive societal impact.</p>
Corrupt entrepreneurial ecosystem	<p>There is a generalized corrupt entrepreneurial ecosystem that lacks godly values, negatively impacting the quality and ethics of products and services. This environment fosters a culture where unethical practices are normalized, creating a cycle where new entrepreneurs adopt similar self-serving practices to succeed. Research indicates that without integrating ethical frameworks such as Kingdom Business principles into the ecosystem, it becomes difficult to foster entrepreneurs who can drive holistic national transformation (Habinshuti, 2024).</p>

The Role of Kingdom Business Principles

RQ2: How can Kingdom Business principles be effectively integrated into existing entrepreneurial support frameworks in Africa?

The integration of Kingdom Business principles presents a transformative opportunity to address the identified gaps within Africa’s entrepreneurial ecosystem. Emphasizing ethical stewardship, excellence, and community-focused development, these principles can provide a framework for creating a more supportive environment for young entrepreneurs (see Table 2).

Table 2: Kingdom Business Principles to be Integrated Within the African Contexts

Principles	Explaining findings
Ethical stewardship	Ethical stewardship is central to Kingdom Business principles and emphasizes responsible management of resources, relationships, and communities. This approach can significantly improve access to finance by encouraging a shift in how investors and financial institutions view entrepreneurship. By fostering a culture of trust and accountability, ethical stewardship can help mitigate perceived risks associated with funding young entrepreneur enterprises. As revealed by interviews with leaders of BDC and reemphasized by Global Skills Factory Oy as case studies, embedding ethical practices within business operations can attract support from stakeholders who value integrity and sustainability (Habinshuti, 2024). Furthermore, ethical stewardship can create an environment where collaborative funding initiatives thrive, enabling access to resources that might otherwise remain out of reach for emerging entrepreneurs.
Excellence in execution	The principle of excellence is pivotal in enhancing the operational capacity of entrepreneurs. Through adopting an excellence-minded approach, young entrepreneurs can improve their business execution and delivery, making their offerings more competitive in the marketplace. Kingdom Business principles encourage entrepreneurs to not only meet market demands but also to innovate and set new standards within their industries. This focus on excellence can help address the gap of limited mentorship opportunities by fostering a culture of peer support and knowledge sharing. Entrepreneurs who commit to excellence are more likely to seek mentors and collaborators who can guide them in refining their skills and expanding their networks. Moreover, educational programs that incorporate Kingdom Business values can equip

Principles	Explaining findings
Community-focused development	<p>aspiring entrepreneurs with the tools they need to excel, thereby bridging the gap between education and practical application (Teece, 2018).</p> <p>Kingdom Business principles emphasize the importance of community impact, which can play a crucial role in addressing the fragmented market linkages currently experienced in Africa. By focusing on community-oriented business models, entrepreneurs can create networks that foster collaboration and mutual support. Initiatives that prioritize local partnerships, such as sourcing materials from local suppliers and engaging with community stakeholders, can strengthen market linkages and enhance the sustainability of businesses. This approach not only benefits individual entrepreneurs but also contributes to the broader economic development of communities, aligning with the ethical imperatives of the Kingdom Business framework. Case studies reveal that businesses rooted in community engagement often achieve greater resilience and long-term success, as they are better positioned to adapt to local needs and market dynamics (Acs, 2019).</p>
Holistic support systems	<p>The holistic nature of Kingdom Business principles calls for a comprehensive support system that encompasses financial, educational, and emotional resources for youth entrepreneurs. By integrating ethical training, mentorship, and access to finance into a cohesive support framework, stakeholders can create a more conducive environment for entrepreneurial growth. This model encourages collaboration among ESOs, private-sector actors, and government agencies to align their efforts with Kingdom Business values, ultimately, leading to a more robust entrepreneurial ecosystem (Habinshuti, 2024). The successful implementation of such support systems requires commitment and cooperation from various stakeholders, emphasizing the need for shared goals and collective action, which supports the need for a collaborative ecosystem model.</p>

Case Study Insights

RQ3: What successful case studies exist that demonstrate the application of Kingdom Business principles in enhancing entrepreneurship in African contexts?

Insights From the Two Case Studies. This research considered case studies of the **BDC**, an entrepreneur training program certified by Regent University, and **Global Skills Factory Oy**, two innovative models that emphasize ethical, values-based entrepreneurship training, mentorship, and ecosystem support. Both organizations aim to drive sustainable economic development in emerging economies by fostering not only applied entrepreneurship but also emphasizing ethical values, integrity, and collaboration.

BDC. The BDC is an initiative of Regent University's Center for Entrepreneurship to transform people and nations through business. Grounded in a Kingdom Business approach, BDC operates under the principle that the ultimate solution to poverty is enterprise rather than charity, with entrepreneurship playing a pivotal role in uplifting disadvantaged communities. Through its unique licensing model, BDC has managed to expand its reach by training and supporting facilitators locally, who in turn deliver ethical entrepreneurship curricula. This approach not only spreads Christian values but also fills critical gaps in business infrastructure by providing training, mentorship, and access to professional networks.

BDC's model prioritizes ethical business conduct by embedding values in every aspect of its training and support services. For example, the BDC offers programs tailored to different stages of business development, from basic entrepreneurship for startups to advanced training for scaling enterprises. BDC resources and services for its graduates complement traditional business support by ensuring that entrepreneurs have access to necessary business support (e.g., legal, financial, and marketing) and networking opportunities. This integrated approach helps to address structural challenges in developing economies where business infrastructure is often lacking, making it challenging for SMEs to scale. Additionally, BDC's peer mentoring groups help foster community-based support systems, encouraging entrepreneurs to share resources and knowledge with each other, which promotes an environment of collaboration and mutual growth.

Global Skills Factory Oy. Global Skills Factory Oy is a Finland-based social enterprise that demonstrates a multifaceted approach to fostering sustainable entrepreneurship among young adults in the Global South and immigrant communities in developed countries. Unlike traditional educational programs, Global Skills Factory (2024) combines Nordic startup principles with the best international practices to create standardized and scalable frameworks tailored for developing countries. By blending values-based approaches with practical, technology-enabled training in entrepreneurship and job readiness, Global Skills Factory provides young entrepreneurs with both skills and ethical frameworks to succeed in the market. The collaborative model employed by Global Skills Factory emphasizes local partnerships with entrepreneurship support organizations, incubators, and accelerators across

Africa. This partnership approach is designed to empower local entities to develop products and services that align with the specific needs of their client entrepreneurs and communities.

By embedding Kingdom Business principles into its programs, Global Skills Factory (2024) supports the development of a transparent and collaborative ecosystem. This ecosystem encourages ethical business practices, minimizes corruption, and enables sustainable growth, benefiting both individual entrepreneurs and the larger community. Moreover, Global Skills Factory’s digital platform provides a space for ecosystem players to collaborate, share expertise, and streamline access to resources for entrepreneurs. This digital approach creates a sustainable pipeline for entrepreneurial development, removing barriers that have traditionally limited collaboration and scaling within African entrepreneurial ecosystems. The platform also aims to address systemic issues in the business landscape, such as corruption, by promoting a values-based culture and aligning all partners with ethical business practices.

Comparative Insights. Both the BDC and Global Skills Factory Oy share a commitment to values-based entrepreneurship, though their models differ in scope and implementation. BDC operates a localized licensing model that partners with educational institutions and missions, providing in-depth, face-to-face training and support. Both organizations use action-learning models. In contrast, while Global Skills Factory uses technology and international collaboration to deliver standardized entrepreneurial training and support across multiple regions, BDC had until recently relied on physical training but has launched an online program as well (see Table 3).

Table 3: Comparative Case Studies of Entrepreneur Training and Support Organizations’ (BDC and Global Skills Factory Oy) Solutions Addressing Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Challenges

Challenges in the entrepreneurial ecosystem	BDC	Global Skills Factory Oy
Inadequate entrepreneur support: <i>Limited values-based structured training and</i>	Solution: Offers targeted training at different business stages (startups, scaling, growth of companies) with a strong emphasis on ethical values. Provides ongoing mentorship, coaching, and access to resources, equipping entrepreneurs with both practical skills and ethical	Solution: Provides scalable, tech-enabled entrepreneurship training and practical programs focused on job readiness, entrepreneurship, and values-based certifications. Partners with local support organizations offer sustained

<p>Challenges in the entrepreneurial ecosystem</p>	<p>BDC</p>	<p>Global Skills Factory Oy</p>
<p><i>mentorship programs.</i></p>	<p>foundations to operate responsibly. Values impact: BDC’s ethical training instills integrity, ensuring entrepreneurs can build trustworthy and values-based businesses.</p>	<p>mentorship and resources for emerging entrepreneurs. Values impact: Focuses on developing entrepreneurs who prioritize ethical practices and community welfare, preparing them for holistic, sustainable success.</p>
<p>Access to finance <i>Few financial institutions cater to young entrepreneurs.</i></p>	<p>Solution: Facilitates connections to financial services, including networks of angel investors, bankers, and private equity, specifically for values-based business models. Values impact: By establishing trust and ethical conduct, BDC enables entrepreneurs to present themselves as reliable, reducing perceived risk for investors.</p>	<p>Solution: Builds partnerships with financial services and strategic investors, creating pathways for funding through collaboration. The values-driven framework appeals to <i>impact investors</i> seeking ethical businesses. Values impact: Cultivates entrepreneurs who understand the importance of financial transparency and accountability, thus enhancing investor confidence.</p>
<p>Market fragmentation <i>SMEs struggle to access broader markets.</i></p>	<p>Solution: BDC provides a network of connections to strategic partners and markets and offers specialized consulting for business expansion. Emphasis on ethical business conduct helps entrepreneurs gain trust and recognition in new markets. Values impact: Entrepreneurs are encouraged to collaborate and share resources, fostering a sense of community and enabling access to larger networks and markets.</p>	<p>Solution: Through a digitized collaborative platform, Global Skills Factory connects ecosystem players, streamlining access to markets and establishing a pipeline for products and services to reach a broader audience. Values impact: The platform’s Kingdom Business values create a trustworthy network where businesses and customers alike are confident</p>

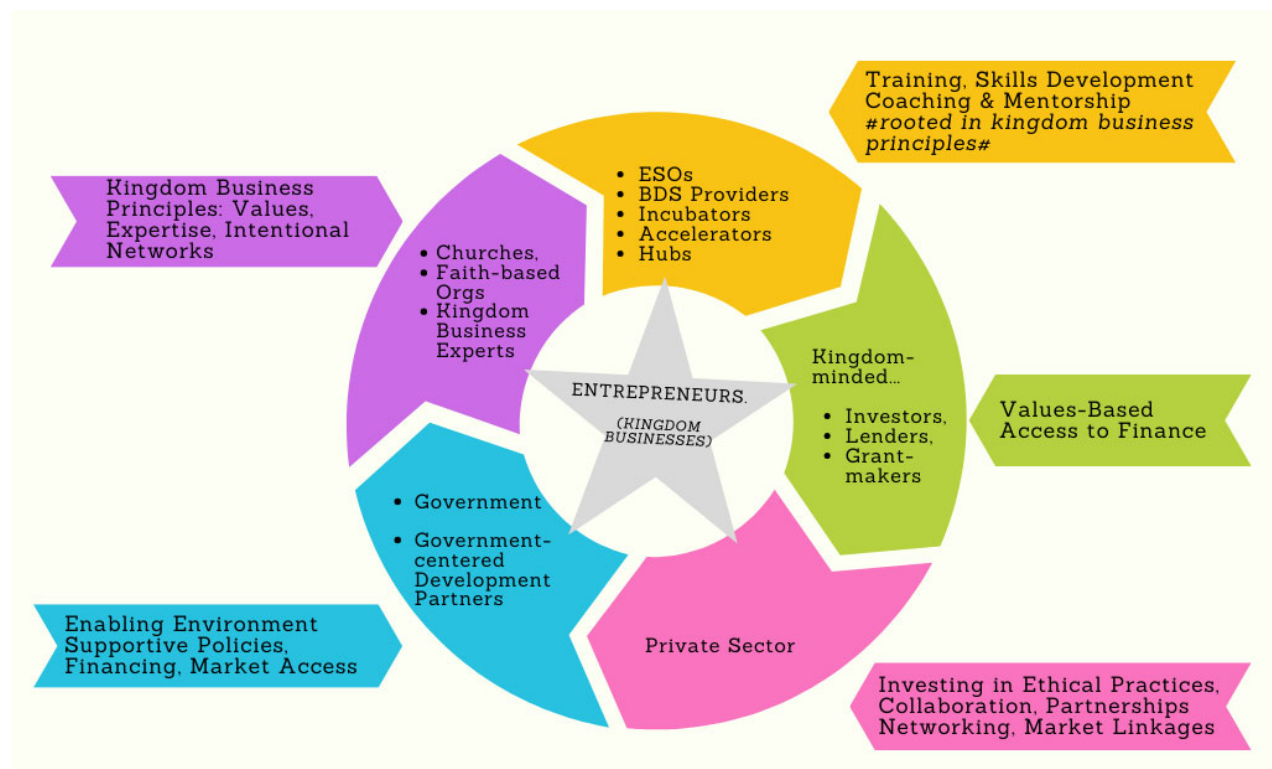
<p>Challenges in the entrepreneurial ecosystem</p>	<p>BDC</p>	<p>Global Skills Factory Oy</p>
<p>Regulatory barriers <i>Business formalization remains complex and time consuming.</i></p>	<p>Solution: BDC assists entrepreneurs with “doing business in” services, providing guidance for navigating local regulations and partnering with government offices to ease formalization. Values impact: Ethical grounding prepares entrepreneurs to operate transparently and responsibly, ensuring smoother relations with regulatory bodies.</p>	<p>in the integrity of services and products. Solution: Facilitates access to legal expertise and government offices, guiding entrepreneurs on ethical compliance and advocating for values-driven business conduct that aligns with regulatory expectations. Values impact: Encourages transparency and ethical compliance, helping entrepreneurs navigate regulations while building reputable businesses.</p>
<p>Corrupt entrepreneurial ecosystem <i>Lack of godly values results in unethical, self-serving entrepreneurs.</i></p>	<p>Solution: Integrates Kingdom Business principles into all training and mentorship, emphasizing integrity, honesty, and service to the community. Through peer mentoring and group support, BDC fosters accountability and ethical behavior. Values impact: Helps create an ecosystem where ethical values are the norm, reducing corruption and encouraging entrepreneurs to contribute positively to society.</p>	<p>Solution: Promotes a collaborative model grounded in ethical values, encouraging a culture of integrity across partnerships and the ecosystem. The digitized platform enforces transparency, discouraging corrupt practices and aligning all participants with a Kingdom-driven approach. Values impact: Instills ethical standards and discourages corruption, creating a trustworthy environment that supports holistic community and business growth.</p>

Kingdom Business Collaborative Ecosystem Model

RQ4: What collaborative ecosystem model can be developed that incorporates Kingdom Business principles at every stage of entrepreneur development?

As it is the aim of this research, the authors designed a collaborative ecosystem model that integrates Kingdom Business principles to create a supportive environment for young entrepreneurs in Africa. The model emphasizes the importance of the integration of ethical values and kingdom business principles at every step of the entrepreneur development process while having the supported entrepreneur at the center and engaging all the stakeholders within their respective responsibilities and activities along the collaborative pipeline-based support system (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 Collaborative Ecosystem Model Visualization



Source for Figure 1: Authors, 2024.

Key Components of the Collaborative Ecosystem Model and Impact on Stakeholders

The successful implementation of the collaborative ecosystem model requires active engagement among various stakeholders to provide a unique role in fostering a supportive environment for young entrepreneurs. The model emphasizes the

importance of collaboration among stakeholders to create a thriving entrepreneurial support ecosystem. Through engaging entrepreneurs, ESOs, the private sector, investors, faith-based organizations, and governments in a manner that incorporates Kingdom Business principles, the model fosters a *holistic* approach to entrepreneurship development that prioritizes ethical practices and positive community impact. This collaborative effort is essential for addressing the challenges faced by entrepreneurs and promoting sustainable economic growth across the African continent. Through collective action, stakeholders can enhance the potential of Kingdom Business principles to transform the entrepreneurial landscape in Africa:

- **Entrepreneurs**
 - **Empowerment through support:** The collaborative model places the entrepreneur at the center of the model. This model provides young entrepreneurs with access to ethical training, mentorship, and financial resources, empowering them to build sustainable businesses grounded in ethical practices. By integrating Kingdom Business principles, entrepreneurs can cultivate a mindset that values integrity, stewardship, and community impact.
 - **Enhanced opportunities:** With better access to networks, funding, and market linkages, entrepreneurs can develop their ideas more effectively and scale their ventures. This collaboration increases their chances of success and allows them to contribute positively to their communities.
 - **Examples:** BDC graduates, Global Skills Factory alumni, etc.
- **ESOs, BDS providers, incubators, accelerators, etc.**
 - **Capacity building:** ESOs, BDS providers, incubators, accelerators, and hubs provide targeted training programs and resources that align with the collaborative ecosystem model. With guidance and expertise from kingdom business experts, they can focus on ethical entrepreneurship and Kingdom Business values and help equip young entrepreneurs with the skills and knowledge necessary for success.
 - **Network facilitation:** ESOs, BDS providers, incubators, accelerators, and hubs act as connectors within the entrepreneurial ecosystem, facilitating entrepreneurs to access mentors, potential investors, networking opportunities, and other resources. This collaboration strengthens the support system available to young entrepreneurs.
 - **Examples:** Rwanda Business Development Center (BDC Rwanda), Global Skills Factory

- Financing institutions (Kingdom-minded investors, grant makers, banks, and others)
 - Value-based access to finance: The collaborative ecosystem model fosters a financial support structure that aligns with Kingdom values, reduces systemic barriers, and enhances trust between entrepreneurs and financiers. This results in a robust, ethically grounded ecosystem where financial institutions play an active role in promoting integrity-driven business practices.
 - Sustainable business growth: Value-based access to finance within the ecosystem model enhances trust and collaboration by aligning financial institutions and entrepreneurs around shared ethical principles. This approach fosters sustainable business growth, improves financial literacy, and expands funding access for underrepresented entrepreneurs. By attracting ethical investors and minimizing corruption, value-based finance supports an inclusive, resilient ecosystem focused on long-term impact and social good.
 - Examples: Vision Finance International (owned by World Vision), Urwego Bank in Rwanda (owned by Opportunity International), Paralex Bank in Nigeria (owned by Christ Embassy Church), Kingdom Bank (United Kingdom)
- Private sector
 - **Investment in ethical practices:** The private sector can contribute to the model by investing in startups that demonstrate adherence to Kingdom Business principles. This investment not only supports the growth of ethical businesses but also enhances corporate social responsibility initiatives.
 - **Collaboration, partnerships, and networking:** Established businesses can partner with emerging entrepreneurs to share resources, provide peer mentorship, and create market opportunities. Such collaboration can lead to innovation and mutual benefits for both parties.
 - **Examples:** International Chamber of Commerce, BDC Alumni Network (across Rwanda, Uganda, South Africa, Zambia, Burkina Faso, Tanzania, Zambia, etc.), Christ Ambassadors in the Marketplace, etc.
 - Governments and government-centered development partners
 - Policy development: Governments play a crucial role in creating an enabling environment for entrepreneurship. In the collaborative ecosystem model, they are responsible for adopting policies that promote ethical business practices and support the integration of ethical principles to foster a culture of innovation and responsible business behavior.
 - Infrastructure investment: Supporting policies and infrastructure development enhances the operational capabilities of entrepreneurs, making it easier for them to access markets and resources. Government initiatives to

- improve access to finance and reduce bureaucratic hurdles can also significantly impact entrepreneurial growth.
- Examples: Rwanda Development Board, development organizations (World Vision, Opportunity International, etc.)
 - Churches and faith-based organizations
 - Promotion of ethical values: Faith-based organizations can play a pivotal role in promoting Kingdom Business principles and infusing kingdom values across the collaborative ecosystem. They also provide kingdom business experts who work to empower organizations that help cultivate a culture of ethical entrepreneurship training, skills development, coaching, and mentorship, including ESOs, business development service providers, accelerators, incubators, and hubs.
 - Intentional networks: Churches and faith-based groups can create intentional networks that provide support, resources, and collaboration opportunities for faith-driven entrepreneurs. These networks can facilitate knowledge sharing, mentorship, and access to funding.
 - Examples: churches, businesses as mission networks, Global Advance, etc.

Recommendations

RQ5: What practical recommendations can be made for governments, private-sector actors, and ecosystem support organizations?

To strengthen the integration of Kingdom Business principles into the entrepreneurial ecosystem, several recommendations can be made for different stakeholders. Actors within the entrepreneurial ecosystem should also foster collaboration with kingdom business experts, faith-based organizations, and local churches to promote ethical business practices among young entrepreneurs and in developing initiatives that encourage knowledge sharing and resource pooling. In this collaborative model, each player's role should be distinct, but the operationalization of the model is based on the interconnectedness of operations. For governments, it is crucial to create supportive policies that promote ethical business practices, such as implementing tax incentives for socially responsible businesses. Additionally, governments should invest in infrastructure to enhance access to finance and market linkages for young entrepreneurs, establishing incubators and innovation hubs focused on ethical practices.

ESOs should enhance capacity-building programs by designing training curricula that incorporate Kingdom Business principles. These programs should put an emphasis on ethical decision-making, stewardship, and community engagement. Furthermore, ESOs can facilitate networking opportunities, creating platforms for young entrepreneurs to connect with established business leaders, mentors, and investors who share a commitment to ethical entrepreneurship through conferences, workshops, and online

networks. Private-sector actors have a significant role to play by engaging in ethical investments, actively seeking opportunities to invest in startups that align with Kingdom Business values. Actionable steps for building a values-based, collaborative ecosystem include establishing a coalition of stakeholders dedicated to integrating Kingdom Business principles into the entrepreneurship ecosystem. This coalition can lead initiatives and raise awareness about the importance of ethical practices. Additionally, promoting community engagement is essential, encouraging businesses to actively engage with local populations to ensure that their operations address social issues through corporate social responsibility initiatives and partnerships with local organizations.

Conclusion

Summary of Findings

This research highlighted the importance of innovative approaches that integrate ethical frameworks into entrepreneurship. The findings emphasize the transformative potential of Kingdom Business principles and the critical role of a collaborative ecosystem model in fostering a more resilient and ethically grounded entrepreneurial landscape in Africa. The integration of Kingdom Business principles – values-centered, excellence-minded, and spirit-led – provides a powerful framework for strengthening Africa's entrepreneurial ecosystem. These principles encourage ethical stewardship, integrity, and a focus on community impact, all of which are vital for fostering sustainable business practices. By addressing the moral and ethical dimensions of entrepreneurship, Kingdom Business approaches can inspire young adults to pursue their entrepreneurial ambitions with a sense of purpose and responsibility, thus contributing to the development of a more ethically driven entrepreneurial culture across Africa. The proposed collaborative ecosystem model illustrates how various stakeholders – entrepreneurs, governments, ESOs, the private sector, and faith-based organizations – can come together to create a supportive environment for young entrepreneurs. By emphasizing ethical training, mentorship, access to finance, and market linkages, the model seeks to provide young entrepreneurs with the necessary resources and knowledge to succeed. This collaborative approach not only addresses the immediate challenges faced by young persons, such as limited access to finance and fragmented market linkages, but also contributes to broader objectives of sustainable development and economic diversification in Africa. Through the alignment of efforts with Kingdom Business principles, stakeholders can work together to build a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem that uplifts communities and promotes long-term economic growth.

Future Research

Looking ahead, further research is needed to explore Kingdom Business approaches across different regions in Africa, conducting comparative studies to identify best practices and regional adaptations. Such research could examine how cultural contexts influence the integration of these principles in entrepreneurship. Moreover, investigating the practical challenges and successes associated with implementing the proposed collaborative ecosystem model in various African countries will provide insights into its effectiveness in supporting young entrepreneurship. Longitudinal studies could also be undertaken to track the impact of Kingdom Business approaches on the growth and sustainability of young adult-led enterprises over time, offering valuable insights into the long-term benefits of ethical practices in business. Finally, sector-specific research could explore the application of Kingdom Business principles within industries, such as technology, agriculture, or renewable energy. Understanding how these principles can be tailored to different sectors will enhance their relevance and effectiveness in fostering ethical entrepreneurship. Addressing the recommendations highlighted by researchers, stakeholders can better leverage Kingdom Business approaches to strengthen the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Africa and create a sustainable future for young entrepreneurs.

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Flourishing Teams for Human Flourishing

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Roundtable: Organizational Leadership Roundtable

Abstract

With the volume of time spent in workplace collaboration, can healthy work teams serve as a primary driver of personal well-being and human flourishing? When work teams are healthy, human flourishing is more likely. Much of the New Testament offers a Christian theology and a practical framework for human flourishing. Paul and other authors, inspired by God, knew of the essential role group dynamics played for individual human flourishing. We suggest flourishing teams – successful in fulfilling their purpose in a healthy and vigorous way – consist of five primary ingredients: strong identity, rallying purpose, good people, thoughtful cadence, and effective communication. With these five essential ingredients, teams better understand who they are, why they exist, who should be on them, and how they function – together and as individuals. Experience has shown that by applying these principles, teams are more likely to achieve effective and efficient outcomes while developing healthy interpersonal relationships. As well-being increases, humans flourish.

Keywords: teams, team development, team identity, purpose, people, cadence, communication

As social creatures, teams can help or hinder human flourishing. With the time spent in workplace collaboration, can healthy work teams serve as a primary driver of personal well-being and human flourishing? When work teams are healthy, human flourishing is more likely. To enable a team to flourish (that is, successfully fulfilling their purpose in a healthy and vigorous way), the team must develop and demonstrate key characteristics. As consultants in team and leadership development, we suggest flourishing teams have five primary ingredients: strong identity, rallying purpose, good

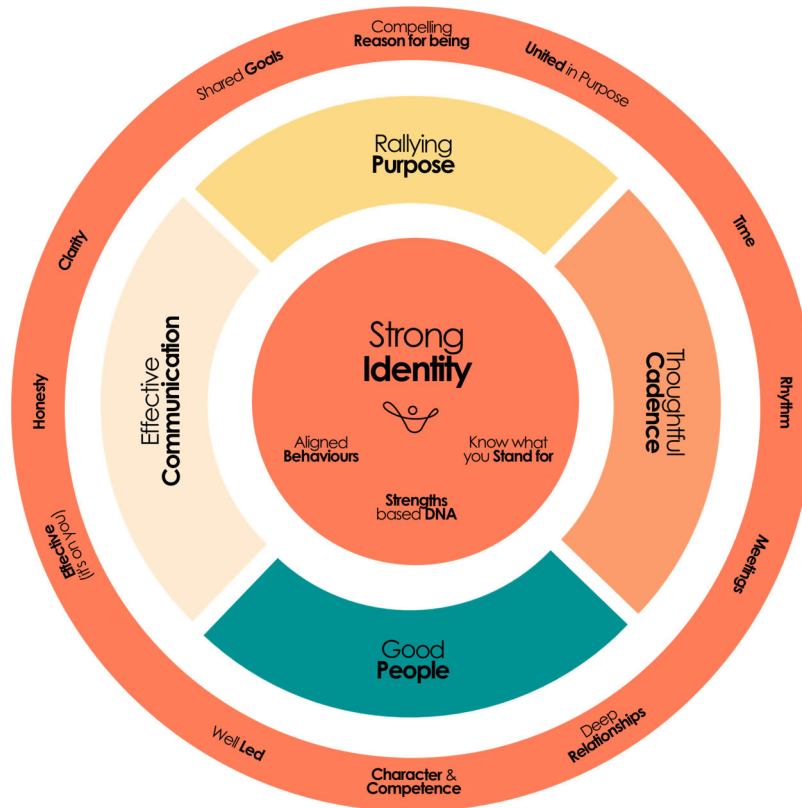
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people, thoughtful cadence, and effective communication – all illustrated in the flourishing teams model (see Figure 1). Each of the five ingredients is supported with three descriptive elements.

Figure 1: *The Flourishing Teams Model*



The applied definition of a team is “a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, set of performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable” (Katzenbach & Smith, 2005, p. 4). Using Hackman’s (1987) framework, team effectiveness is understood using three components: member need satisfaction, team viability, and group performance.

Strong Identity

At the core of a team is its identity. Who we are shapes what we do and why we do it. Aristotle expands on the Greek philosophical concept of Telos, which primarily means “a completed end, the final result” (Golluber, 1999; Waanders, 1983) driven by its intrinsic purpose. Each person or entity has an ultimate, inherent purpose that, when fulfilled, achieves this desired result (Schnitker et al., 2019). The innate purpose

describes its essence or reason for being. Intrinsic essence is the center of who someone is, which is the driver for why someone behaves as they do.

A connection exists with authentic leadership. Leaders must allow their true selves to shape how they lead and how their followers experience them, and this must be grounded in clarity of identity. One must understand who they are to be a truly authentic leader. To be authentic, one must comprehend what they are revealing to fulfill their leadership function effectively (Banks et al., 2016). A similar hypothesis applies here: teams must understand their identity to effectively fulfill their function or purpose. Moreover, their behaviors must align with this identity, as the reflection of identity is perceived and experienced by how leaders act.

Team identity is compiled of its DNA – its unique combination of the strengths of people’s skills and talents (Stewart, 2006), clarity of core beliefs and values (Peter & Waterman, 1982), and behaviors that align with those beliefs and values (Melewar & Karaosmanoglu, 2006). A team’s identity is its distinctiveness, influenced by the culture and context within which it operates. This collective identity developed by a team yields increased effectiveness by uniting around common goals and vision (dos Reis & Puentes-Palacios, 2019).

Rallying Purpose

Where identity shapes who the team is, purpose describes why they exist and how leaders and followers think about their reason for being (Ready & Truelove, 2011). According to Teh (2009), a bold and common purpose unifies and develops a group into a team. The entire team must share this purpose to ensure developed momentum and focus (Adler & Heckscher, 2018), which can be called collective ambition. The rallying purpose brings everyone together, rising above all other priorities to provide focus and shared energy. It provides a compelling reason for being that ensures intrinsic motivation drives alignment with this purpose (Thomas, 2009). Teams demonstrate rallying purpose through shared goals, which propel collective action and enhance shared identity (Claridge, 2020). The shared goals ensure mutual and collective accountability for outcomes, reinforcing collaboration over competition.

Good People

People are the heart of a team, and they need to be good. Good has a double meaning here: good in who they are (described as character) and good in what they do (described by competence). Character and competence yield increased commitment to their team and its outcomes (Hasan et al., 2023). Character and its implied integrity have an inherent moral component and contribute to the effectiveness of a team; Ogunfowora et al. (2021), showed the converse to be confirmed. Competency is

necessary for effective work, but expertise alone will not ensure a thriving team. In fact, Sturm et al. (2017) asserted that the connection between the two improves both characteristics. The balance of character and competence is about the collective and the individual. Teams, whatever their size, are communities. Communities function best in a balance of diversity and complementarity (Bell & Brown, 2015). Like a body, every part is distinct and valuable but needs to fit and function together to flourish.

Teams with good people are well-led. While the scope of defining good leadership is vast, it is summarized here with three core elements: authentic, allied, and adaptable. Well-led teams have leaders who understand who they are and demonstrate transparency in their authenticity (Avolio et al., 2004). They are allied, meaning they understand and align with their organizational context while partnering with and belonging to their team and peers. In a brittle and anxious world, effective leaders are adaptable to their changing environment (Bushuev et al., 2023). It is transformational and prioritizes relationships between people (Banks et al., 2016). This priority of people is demonstrated through deep relationships principally because people drive teams (Hultman & Hultman, 2008).

Notably, good leadership comes after well-developed followership; one follows more than one leads, so learning to follow well comes before leading well. Moreover, in any team setting, the roles of follower and leader are often interchangeable throughout the team lifespan. One might argue that even within the scope of a single meeting, a robust appreciation for and understanding of good followership is required (Linville & Rennaker, 2022).

Thoughtful Cadence

Flourishing teams determine an intentional rhythm designed to ensure robust connection and communication. They regularly use tools such as a team charter to outline agreed ways of working (Mathieu & Rapp, 2009). Cadence needs to involve an annual cycle that reinforces time on essential elements such as strategy, operations, culture, and leadership. The cadence impacts the philosophy of meetings since this is typically the core method of engagement and interaction for teams, which should reflect functional and constructive interaction (Kauffeld & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2012). Teams should know that different rhythms are appropriate for different types of work and prepare to shift accordingly (Oldeweme et al., 2023).

Time is arguably the most fundamental aspect of the cadence for flourishing teams. Time needs to bend to fit a flourishing team, not vice versa. Time is multifaceted: it means enough time for the team to meet and function together (Mcgrath, 1991). It takes time for a flourishing team to form, storm, norm, and perform (Tuckman, 1965), and flourishing teams also need periodic time alone, away from the office, which provides

balance for reflection and growth (Littman-Ovadia, 2019), which together lead to strengthened relationships, increased trust, and psychological safety for high performance.

Effective Communication

Communication is a foundation of team interaction and requires candor (Ware, 2012) and clarity (Gomez, 2008) to ensure mutual understanding internally and externally. Recipient outcomes determine the effectiveness of the communication. Just because one sends the message does not mean it was received as intended. It is on the sender to ensure that the receiver achieves understanding. To ensure knowledge-sharing, it is multichannel (Kotter, 1996), multilateral (Wanberg et al., 2015), and multilayered (Spiliopoulou & Penn, 1999). It uses various mediums, as appropriate, for formal and informal communication with and between team members individually, collectively, and beyond, cascading throughout the team and into the organization. Flourishing teams have also practiced effective conflict communication skills that allow crucial conversations to unearth disagreement and resolve it healthily (Choudrie, 2005; De Dreu & Van Vianen., 2001; Kiernan et al., 2020). The conflict skills include application at teamwide meetings, small group sessions, and one-to-one interactions.

Biblical Worldview

Much of the New Testament offers a Christian theology and a practical framework for human flourishing. It is fascinating how much of it is directed explicitly towards groups of believers. Paul and other authors, inspired by God, knew of the essential role group dynamics played for individual human flourishing. Nowhere is this link between a flourishing team and individual flourishing more evident than in the book of Acts (*New International Version Bible*, 1978/2011), where Luke provides glimpses in his commentary into the life of the early church and the teams of workers who were foundational for this community. The selection of the apostolic replacement for Judas in Acts 1:12-26, the setting apart of the seven workers to care for the widows in Acts 6:1-6, and even the beautiful picture provided in Acts 2:42-47 all highlight the inseparable link between healthy relationships and human flourishing. For the early church, these healthy relationships included an intentional and vital effort to establish positive group norms and flourishing teams.

Conclusion

Recognizing there are myriad options to select critical elements of a high-performing team, the centrality of identity resonates as a unique view. With these five essential ingredients, teams better understand who they are, why they exist, who should be on them, and how they function. Personal experience has shown that by applying these

principles, teams are more likely to flourish and achieve effective and efficient outcomes while developing healthy interpersonal relationships. As well-being increases, humans flourish.

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The Organizational Leadership Dynamics of Human Flourishing

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Roundtable: Organizational Leadership

Abstract

The structure of organizational leadership plays an imperative role in employees' lives, as well as in their mental health and stability within the workplace. This paper explores the following areas: the benefits of employee well-being, the culture of organizational leadership that supports human flourishing, positive reinforcement, self-belonging/inclusion, leadership and organizational identity, organizational commitment, professional development, growth, and job/career satisfaction. Each topic about organizational leadership and structure from a biblical perspective is thoroughly explained. Practical applications for improvement and how to reach your employees and help them be included in the growth process are provided.

Keywords: organizational leadership, professional development, human flourishing, biblical perspective, self-belonging

Introduction

These questions might come to your mind: How do people flourish within an organization? How can employees flourish? How can employers help their employees flourish? Northouse (2019) elaborated on the *skills approach*: "The skills approach takes a leader-centered perspective on leadership" (p. 44). Skills are what leaders can accomplish. Traits are what make leaders who they are. When looking at the organizational leadership dynamics of human flourishing, it is significant to use the three-skill approach: technical skills, human skills, and conceptual skills.

Technical Skills

According to Northouse (2019), "Technical skills are knowledge about and proficiency in a specific type of work or activity" (p. 44). Each person on this planet was created by

Christ in his image and granted different qualities and gifts. As an organizational leader, we must be able to identify employees' strengths and weaknesses. For example, I am called to teach. I would never want to weld. I would burn something up and should not operate a welding gun because I do not know how to use it. Am I teachable? Yes. But you never want to put someone in a position where they will fail. Employers must recognize their employees' strengths so they can flourish, grow, and move up the ladder – not down.

Human Skills

Northouse (2019) stated, "Human skills are knowledge about and ability to work with people" (p. 44). This means being able to work with individuals and on group projects, knowing how to work with followers, and can they be leaders. If they were given a task, could they accomplish the task and meet the organization's goals, or would they fail? Knowing an individual's human skills helps you place the employee on the right team, enables them to grow as a professional, and equips your company and them for success (Northouse, 2019, p. 44).

Conceptual Skills

Conceptual skills are knowing how to think outside the box. This means being innovative and using creative ideas to complete the task given. According to Northouse (2019), "Technical skills deal with *things* and human skills deal with *people*, conceptual skills involve working with *ideas*" (p. 45). Leaders who have conceptual skills are comfortable talking about their ideas, which enhances the organization's growth and helps ideas come to pass.

The Benefits of Employee Well-Being

I have worked in many places in my 41 years of life. Some were jobs to get me through college, some were jobs to get me experience, and some were jobs to help build up my career so I could land my dream job as a professor. It took many years and much sacrifice to get where I am today. But it was worth it all.

Employers often do not recognize the importance of the benefits of understanding the employees' well-being. Employees want to be appreciated, shown compassion and empathy, and recognized for a job well done; they deserve days of rest without interruption. In *Life-Changing Leadership Habits*, Jeff Doolittle (2023) elaborated on ways to increase transformational tools and exercises for loving followers (p. 48). I thought this was true. Following are a few examples to improve the well-being of your employees:

1. Practice what you preach as the leader. Do not expect the employee to follow through if you never do.
2. Serve your employees equally.
3. Serve your employees. Let them know their value and worth.
4. Be honest with your employees, and they will be honest with you.
5. Seek to build trust rather than insecurities within your employees.
6. Promote how valuable your employees are, be interested in their ideas, and be willing to listen.
7. Compensate over time and give them rest for the hours worked.
8. Understand family is important and valued.
9. Provide childcare for single parents.
10. Provide community and team-building exercises (Doolittle, 2023, pp. 48-49).

By doing some of these steps, your employee will find a work/life balance, feel valued, and want to come to work, rather than drag their feet. To flourish in an organization, one must take care of their employees and know their worth.

The Culture of Organizational Leadership that Supports Human Flourishing

Examine your own life and look at how far you have come. If I had to guess, I would imagine we have all grown from where we were 20 years ago. I know I have. I never thought I would be teaching college, because growing up, I hated school. I am dyslexic, and school was extremely hard for me. It was my grandmother who encouraged me to get an education because she never had the opportunity to go.

To grow your organization, you must be willing to invest in your employees. This means the organization needs to support human flourishing in ways such as providing means to grow their knowledge, obtain professional development, and receive tuition reimbursement. One of my favorite professors who passed away during my doctoral program wrote in his book *The Light Prize*, "Discovery is the uncovering, identification, and recognition of a new concept, property, truth, or algorithm" (Oster, 2011, p. 20). One cannot flourish if one cannot uncover their true gifts or if their employer does not support their willingness to grow. If an organization does not support an employee, the employee will go elsewhere – where they can grow and flourish. Oster (2011) stated, "Rich or poor, educated or illiterate, friend or foe: all equally deserve our attention and service" (p. 133). Everyone in an organization deserves the opportunity to grow and flourish. If we are keeping our employees from growing, are we allowing our organization to grow?

Positive Reinforcement

Positive reinforcement within an organization is one of the best things an organization can do. As humans, we all make mistakes. We are also quick to point out faults but slow

to praise accomplishments. According to Amber Preston (2024), “Nonverbal communication is also important. Your body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions all contribute to how your message is received” (p. 31). Nonverbal communication resonates with positive reinforcement. Leadership is not always about pointing out the flaws; it is about finding the positive within an individual’s work ethic, skills, drive, and motivation – finding their success. It is hard for a person to flourish if an organization cannot find the positive within the employee.

When looking at positive reinforcement, the top value within an organization should be prioritizing positive reinforcement, understanding how to help employees reach their full potential, creating a strategic plan to offer professional development, and encouraging employees to gain new skills, so they can be up to date with new technology and attend to gain more expertise in their career. It is significant to empower employees to do their best and help them to reach their full potential. We all know the 21st Century is filled with unexpected business. Organizations are overloading their exceptional employees because they know they are dependable, and resilient, and will not let them down. Preston (2024) wrote, “When we take the time to step back and identify what’s truly important, we can cut through the noise and focus on the work that has the greatest impact” (p. 43). Prioritizing enables the organization to use the time and energy of their employees more efficiently, which will lead to success and less stress (Preston, 2024, p. 43). If the organization does not prioritize, employees will experience *burnout*.

In *The Lasting Impact of Positive Leadership*, Stan Toler (2019) explained the four aspects of coaching concerning a positive work environment:

1. *Leading*. If you want a good team, lead well. Your employees will follow the leader. Leadership is learned not taught (Toler, 2019, p. 43). I would imagine if we took a trip down memory lane, we all would have someone we admire or look up to. For me, it is my grandmother. She was a true leader as a follower of Christ. She taught me to pray, to always have compassion, and to not be a follower but a leader. She taught me not to go with the world but to always renew my mind with the Word of God. Imagine for a minute you are picking the person you want to be on your dream team. When you pick your team, you are helping the members grow and flourish and eventually take over your company. You do not want someone who is not willing to lead and be an example; you want someone always willing to grow and take the company to the next step. You teach them how to be successful, not how to fail.
2. *Mentoring*. Mentoring is taking time to invest in a person’s life (Toler, 2019, p. 43). Going back to your dream team. Remember, you are raising the team to take over your company. Therefore, you want to be a great mentor to them. Lead them in the way you would want to be led. As a mentor, it is your job to

motivate your team to succeed with excellence. Excellence is earned – not given. According to Toler (2019), “Mentors are teachers. They relate and motivate by sharing knowledge” (p. 44). When you are forming your team, share your knowledge so that your employees can grow and be inspired by your vision and mission for the company.

3. *Relating*. If you want to create the best dream team, you have to be able to relate to your team. Be excited to see your team. Do not keep any secrets from your team. Be open and authentic with your agenda. Be loyal to your team. Be willing to set the stage for excellence; doing this means stepping out of your comfort zone and being willing to lead while relating to each team member (Toler, 2019, p. 46).
4. *Training*. Training is essential and significant when moving your dream team to success. It does not matter if your company is large or small, you cannot afford to miss out on training. This training can be discussing your strengths, weaknesses, and values or teaching interpersonal communication within the organization. What makes the best team? Training allows you to discuss where the organization is going. This allows your team to discuss moving forward, accomplishing goals, and setting new goals. What motivates your team? How are you going to get from Point A to Point B? Team planning is teaching your team to tell others to buy into what is being said or accomplished. If no one says anything, no one will buy into what is taking place (Toler, 2019, p. 50).

Self-Belonging/Inclusion: What does this mean in a workplace?

Each organization is filled with different types of dynamics. This means the organization will be filled with a diverse population of employees. The larger the organization, the more cliques you will have – there will be more outcasts, and people will be lost in the crowd. Keith (2024) stated, “People flourish when they are able to accomplish their personal goals and realize their potential” (p. 61). Organizations often do not want to hear from employees, nor do they even ask for their ideas. Keith wrote, “Greenleaf emphasized the importance of a unifying dream” (p. 63). A dream comes by having a mission or goal. Employees want to know their thoughts and dreams matter, this allows them to feel a sense of belonging, including them in the process. Including them in the mission makes them feel like they are making a difference and helping it flourish and grow.

Leadership and Organizational Identity

Understanding your leadership role within an organization can often be mind-boggling. Nowadays, everyone wants you to *stay in your lane*. Not many are willing to help share the load or to help others be successful. People are often jealous of success, envious of decisions, and not willing to help you achieve your goals. Peter K. Scheuermann (2023)

elaborated on where a leader can live out their values – begin to identify and define, both as an individual and within an organization, can live out their values and strengths within an organization, along with strengthening their weaknesses. The first step is to understand their values and achieve their goals. This includes both terminal and instrumental goals and how they are put together (Scheuermann, 2023, p. 43).

1. Understand your organization and your role as a leader. What are your values? Strengths? Vision? Do these values align with your vision as a leader?
2. Understand the culture. Does the culture create a safe place for you and others to grow as leaders? Is the organization supportive? Are you supported as an employee?
3. Do your visions align with the organization's values both internally and externally?
4. How will the organization help the leadership team and organizational identity be successful? How will the dream team become successful within the organization?

Answering these questions will help you to understand your role as a leader and help you to understand the organization's identity. If your values do not match up with those of the organization, you might be working in the wrong place and find yourself comprising your values, goals, and morals to meet the organization's standards before meeting your own.

Commitment to the Organization

When looking at commitment to the organization, this can go many ways. When interviewing a new employee, you may ask, how long do you plan to work here? Is this just a temporary job to get you to the next level? You may ask some really hard questions during the interview to discover if the person is qualified and committed to the organization. This is normal. We like to think people are going to invest in the organization and never leave.

To keep employees, we must be willing to meet them where they are. People do not leave their jobs, they leave leaders. If an employee is in a position where there is no room for growth, they will end up leaving in 6 months to a year for a better opportunity. Michael Berg (2020) stated, "In each vocation, the Christian is called to die to self and to live for others" (p. 8). Satan will always try and screw up our vocation. Satan will attack your mind with thoughts of improper pride and self-justification (Berg, 2020, p. 8). When Satan begins to attack, he attempts to change your mindset of your calling to self-justification (Berg, 2020, p. 8). This means that the vocation is all about *your* wants and needs. In the end, it is about the employees' wants and needs.

How can we serve them better? How can we help them grow and flourish in their calling? What can we do better to meet the needs of everyone who is in our care?

Professional Development, Growth, and Job/Career Satisfaction

Professional Development

Professional development is significant when moving up in a career/vocation. It helps you remain up to date on what is taking place in the classroom and new technology, and you are able to meet the needs of the next generation. We all know we get older and wiser, but as we grow into our careers, things change, and we need to be prepared to take the organization to the next level.

David A. Garvin and Michael A. Roberto (2011) stated, “A legacy of disappointment and distrust creates an environment in which employees automatically condemn the next turnaround champion to failure, assuming that he or she is ‘just like all the others’” (p. 17). With professional development comes change. This means we need to find the strengths and weaknesses of the employees. Where do they need improvement? How can we help them grow? A great leader helps coach their team to success; they are not just going to rely on them to do it on their own. Garvin and Roberto advised, “Turnaround leaders must also gain trust by demonstrating through word and deed that they are the right leaders for the job and must convince employees that theirs is the correct plan for moving forward” (p. 18). If you believe what you say, your employees will believe what you say. Employees have to know you have a vision and mission for their success. If an employee is willing to grow, it is important to provide them with a strategic plan to reach their full potential.

Growth

It is normal to want to *grow and expand your knowledge* so you can advance in your career. With growth often comes growing pains. Growing pains are identifying your weaknesses, creating a plan, and moving forward to be successful. Take a glance at Joshua 11:15 where Moses and Joshua were focusing on their relationship. Joshua had taken the teachings of his mentor and accomplished more than Moses. Joshua was able to get God’s people to the Promised Land. Joshua focused on four areas: teaching, training by repetition, training by example, and impartation. Then there was the result. Moses believed in Joshua and, therefore, reproduced himself in Joshua. Just like the people honored Moses, they honored Joshua (Garing, 2011, pp. 117-119).

As leaders, we are called to produce successors. We are to model the image for each follower and our organization and to help each employee reach their full potential. If you are not doing the right thing, like cheating and telling lies, would you want an organization full of people just like you? The answer is no! If it is yes, you need to check

your motives. To reach your full potential, you must be challenged to be better than you were yesterday.

Job and Career Satisfaction

What does it mean to have satisfaction within your career/job? It means you are satisfied with where God has you, you are excited to go to work, and you help mentor others along your journey. I imagine that everyone has had a job where it was miserable to go to work. There was always someone trying to steal your joy or thunder. This person was shaking the entire building like an earthquake. It was like you were walking on eggshells. This is not job satisfaction. If you find yourself in this place, it might be time to move forward. We are all humans trying to find our destiny. No one is perfect and no job or career is perfect. There is always room for growth, change, and mentorship.

When evaluating job and career satisfaction, four strategies can make leaders more effective. This will help to improve growth vocation and career satisfaction within the organization.

- *Better decision-making*: Thinking strategically allows servant leaders to think of future challenges and opportunities for growth.
- *Being adaptable*: Prepare your employees to adapt to change. Knowing how to adapt to change will promote job satisfaction. Do not get stuck in your ways. Be willing to move forward.
- *Innovative ideas*: Encourage your employees to come up with innovative ideas to meet goals and standards within the organization.
- *Employee engagement and motivation*: Make sure your employees have a sense of belonging and a sense of purpose and they understand the direction of the organization. Allow input from employees and understand their vision for the organization. Including your team provides a place of belonging, along with understanding the vision of the organization so it can advance rather than diminish (Meade, 2023, pp. 57-58).

Conclusion

In conclusion, *the organizational leadership dynamics of human flourishing* help to create the organization of your dreams. When you understand the goals of the organization, you create a strategic plan of growth to help employees flourish and help the organization continue to grow. Investing in the organization along with your employees builds character and job satisfaction and creates a mentorship with both the employee and the organization.

Author's Biography

Dr. Jamie Wright has been teaching in academia since 2013. She has excelled in the career path she has chosen. Dr. Wright is an Associate Professor, with the speech faculty for New Mexico Military Institute, where she teaches Public Speaking, Intercultural Communication, Interpersonal Communication, and Introduction to Communication, and is in charge of the Ruppert-Burton Speech Contest. She is resilient, loved by her students and colleagues, and always goes the extra mile. She earned her Doctor of Strategic Leadership degree in May 2021 from Regent University in Virginia Beach, Virginia, where she was a Doctoral Fellow for the School of Communication. She is a 2017 graduate from Eastern New Mexico University where she obtained a Master of Arts in Communication. In 2012, she graduated with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Psychology from West Virginia University of Parkersburg, West Virginia.

Dr. Wright has been extremely successful not only in her academic career but in her personal life as well. She loves to do research and edit scholarly papers and books for colleagues and former students. She enjoys spending time with her husband, Chris, and her two chocolate Labs – Biscuit and Beau Jangles. For fun, Jamie enjoys running marathons, traveling the world, serving in the community, attending sporting events, gardening, attending church, serving at church events, and spending time with friends and family. She has a love for the educational system, a passion for helping students thrive in and out of the classroom and mentoring students on the career path they have chosen. She is one of a kind and the best in my eyes. Even in her darkest hours, her hope was found in Jesus. Jesus has been her guide and continues to lead her on the path on which he has called her.

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Partnerships of Honor: Chairs' Reflection and Advance

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Roundtable: Professional Coaching

Abstract

This article is a strategic future-focused review by the Professional Coaching Roundtable (PCR) chairs and presents highlights of two panel discussions, presenter-recorded presentations, and collaborative conversations. The theme for the PCR was *Partnerships of Honor*. Eight presenters in the PCR are from varied professions, supporting the trend of the expanding contexts of coaching. Three coaching models were presented through the PCR: the “One Word leadership” model, the “cognitive coaching” model, and the effective “effective leaders is” model™. Two case studies were presented, three presentations addressed health or the medical field, one presentation homed in on a coaching skill, and one presentation invited attendees into a new frontier of coaching – the metaverse. Practitioners noted the high value of creating trust, focusing on where the client wants to focus, building confidence, listening, asking questions, and accountability as essential in coaching partnerships that lead to flourishing.

Keywords: coaching, partnership, honor, flourishing, purpose

Introduction

What leads to a client's flourishing in the coach-client partnership? Stay with us as participants in the Professional Coaching Roundtable (PCR) answer this question and more about partnerships of honor. This article is a strategic future-focused review by the PCR chairs and presents highlights of two panel discussions, presenter-recorded presentations, and collaborative conversations.

Panelists in the PCR prepared and recorded presentations for the School of Business and Leadership (SBL) Annual Research Roundtable around the theme of *Partnerships of Honor*. Two live panels were held to offer participants the opportunity to expand on concepts from their presentations, engage ideas, and have conversations with other presenters (Brown, Humphries, Schardt et al., 2024; Brown, Tamakloe, & Walker, 2024). This article draws from, summarizes, and forwards those coaching concepts and conversations. Topics presented in this article include partnerships, honor, flourishing, purpose, and Christian coaching.

Additionally, this article includes an emergent working definition of “Christian coaching,” which stems from a combination of responses from a panel question asked during the *Expanding Contexts of Coaching* discussion, the overall discussion content from both live PCR panels, and conversations between the PCR chairs in preparation for this article. As the article closes, we challenge professionals and extend to practitioners and researchers a call for continuing research and Christian coaching practice.

The 2024 Call for Abstracts and the Response for Professional Coaching

Each year, a roundtable theme is determined and approved by the SBL dean, Dr. Doris Gomez. Once the SBL theme is announced, roundtable chairs consider and select themes for each profession-focused roundtable. The theme for the 2024 SBL Annual Roundtables was *Human Flourishing – Its Role in Business & Leadership*. The corresponding theme for the PCR was *Partnerships of Honor*. Ten unique roundtables were developed along with three plenary speakers. A progression of themes is provided in Appendix A. To assist in framing the article, we have included the Call for Abstracts for the 2024 Professional Coaching Roundtable.

The theme for the 2024 SBL Roundtables is perfectly suited for Professional Coaching! At its essence, coaching is a profession honoring the individual. Coaches recognize and acknowledge the unique qualities of each client and work collaboratively with them to facilitate their personal growth and development. We invite presenters to submit their work showcasing the distinct aspects of a biblical approach to coaching and its underlying principles. We challenge presenters to illustrate the effectiveness of models they have developed and applied. Practitioners are strongly encouraged to present case studies and best practices from their experiences. Priority consideration for this Roundtable is given to presentations involving multiple authors. All presentations should demonstrate the interconnectedness between coaching and human flourishing. (Regent University 2024 Annual Research Roundtables, 2024)

Three elements comprise the SBL Roundtables: recorded presentations, live panels, and a journal proceedings publication. In the case of the PCR, eight recorded presentations were submitted. These eight presenters, which included the two chairs, were invited to and chose to participate in a live panel on Thursday, November 14, 2024. This panel was titled *Expanding Contexts of Coaching*. (Brown, Humphries, Schardt, et al., (2024, November 14) On Friday, November 15, 2024, three presenters, along with the chairs, participated in a live panel titled *Coaching Influence and Human Flourishing*. The live panels were insightful and inspiring and extended the presenters' recorded presentations. Before we highlight the live conversations, we will present summaries of the recorded presentations since all readers do not have the advantage of reviewing these. Our summaries are intended to provide context for the live panel discussion highlights that follow.

Recorded Presentation Summative Highlights

The presenters who responded to the call are leadership development professionals who include coaching as part of their repertoire. Additionally, everyone participating in the 2024 Professional Coaching Roundtable holds a doctorate or Ph.D.: six are Doctors of Strategic Leadership (DSL) and two are Doctors of Philosophy (Ph.D.). These practitioners bring models, vast and verified coaching experience, and engaging exploration to the coaching conversations. Seven presenters are business owners: Brown, Schardt, Tamakloe, Walker, Wheatley Pearson, Whelan, and Wiater. Four presenters returned from the previous year's roundtable and include Brown, Walker and the chair and co-chair, Wiater and Whelan respectively. Four other presenters are internal coaches: Brown, Humphries, Schardt, and Wheatley Pearson. All engage clients in coaching relationships toward individual flourishing.

Dr. Brandi Humphries (2024), introducing her case study of succession planning and its near failure, noted,

The challenges were too significant. The disconnects created devastating canyons so deep and far apart that there felt like no way out. This feeling of hopelessness served as a reminder for me that all things are possible through God. How can the organization thrive through this process and progress toward a successful transition? God is the way through these dark organizational times. He is the one who can guide, bless, and ensure we flourish. (B. Humphries, personal communication, November 7, 2024)

As the presentation progressed, Humphries asked,

What is the most effective way forward for everyone within the enterprise to grow and develop, ultimately leading to more robust and trusting relationships

by serving one another to meet the ultimate succession goal through relentless prayer and hopeful spirit,

a call to coaching was heard loud and clear. (B. Humphries, personal communication, November 7, 2024).

Dr. Digna Wheatley Pearson (2024), in her presentation expressed hope for client peace and well-being and points listeners to Christian coaching.

So, when we partner with God, according to Jeremiah 29:11 it says, For I know the plans and the thoughts that I have for you, says the Lord, plans for peace and well-being and not for disaster to give you a future and a hope. How do you partner with God? I am so glad you asked. Coaching is available, Christian coaching that is available for those who desire to increase. (D. Wheatley Pearson, personal communication, November 7, 2024)

Dr. Debbie Schardt (2024), in her presentation expressed why she coaches new leaders and the strength the coaching partnership brings.

One of my niches in coaching is new leaders. I thoroughly enjoy working with either a new leader, a new leader who has no experience, or rising leaders, and they are prime candidates for coaching because they are vulnerable. They're overwhelmed, they're confused, they're inexperienced, and quite often off balance between their personal and professional life, which does make them ideal, because when we think about coaching, it means that they don't have to do life alone as a leader. (D. Schardt, personal communication, November 7, 2024)

Schardt continued,

So, when we honor our client and coaching partnership, we can help young leaders in any industry flourish and thrive, build confidence, competence, and strengths, understand that excellence requires personal growth, and embrace leadership excellence in the pursuit of perfection. ... And as coaches, we want our clients to be excellent. We want them to thrive. (D. Schardt, personal communication, November 7, 2024)

Dr. Pat Tamakloe (2024) founder of the Cognitive Coaching Consortium International noted, it is a network of coaches who use the cognitive coaching model just to help leaders attain their levels of self awareness and to help them reach an optimal level of effectiveness as decision makers. I'm compelled to understand this discovery that I made of the need to bridge the gap between holistically challenged leaders and sound health and wellness. I noticed that leaders were sometimes broken and dysfunctional, and yet they were expected to

lead well. My research of showing that executive leaders from all spheres of professional life tend to experience a challenge with anxiety and with stress, the intent here is to be able to bridge that gap for them in their social, physical and mental health. (P. Tamakloe, personal communication, November 7, 2024)

Dr. Lakeisha Walker (2024), as a returning PCR presenter, noted,

As a leader, I don't want to simply lead. I want to lead from a place of growth and to be an effective leader. ... Human Flourishing entails self-awareness, growth, transformation, holistic health, and purpose fulfillment. Human flourishing is vital to business success and sustainability and is evident in one's leadership effectiveness amid the world's various offerings of pleasure. (L. Walker, personal communication, November 7, 2024)

In addition, Walker provided statistics on coaching effectiveness, indicating a "70% increase in individual performance when people have operated in a coaching mindset and when they have allowed coaching to be a part of their organization" (L. Walker, personal communication, November 7, 2024). When people go through coaching, there is an "88% increase in organization productivity," and concerning teams, "there was an increase of 50% in team performance of individuals who have gone through some type of coaching. ... Coaching speaks for itself" (L. Walker, personal communication, November 7, 2024).

Dr. Shoneen Brown (2024), a returning PCR presenter and recently promoted senior associate director of student support at Regent University, presented "a student achievement partner program partnering with Regent University athletic department and enrollment management and enrollment management advising" (S. Brown, personal communication, November 7, 2024) This work has now expanded to a university department, as Brown noted the pilot program achieved a success rate of 88%. Brown further described the program's success.

After 6 months, students in the coach group were 5.2% more likely to still be enrolled than those in the non-coach group. These students experienced a meaningful, lasting impact of coaching, which persisted at least one more year after the coaching had concluded. (S. Brown, personal communication, November 7, 2024)

In addressing academic advisors, Brown noted they

should use basic coaching skills, asking open-ended probing questions that center on student concerns while allowing students to guide the conversation and structure their sessions. ... Advisors can boost effectiveness by using coaching skills like active listening, goal setting, and empathy, encouraging

accountability, offering reflective feedback, and focusing on strengths to create a more supportive, personalized, advising experience that empowers students to succeed. (S. Brown, personal communication, November 7, 2024)

Dr. Kelly Whelan (2024), a returning PCR presenter and co-chair, in launching into new frontiers through her presentation on the metaverse, noted,

What was once regarded as the future of coaching has now become our present reality, and this shift highlights the necessity for practitioners like you to refine your skills, embrace innovative coaching environments, and engage in discussions with your clients about how they want to meet and what their meeting requirements are. (K. Whelan, personal communication, November 7, 2024)

Later in the presentation, she noted, "each modality of coaching has benefits and drawbacks. What remains the same is the need for professional coaches to develop competencies that demonstrate their abilities, but also that you are delivering these competencies with your clients with integrity" (K. Whelan, personal communication, November 7, 2024). Noting that "practitioners must ensure that their practices align with Christian values, promoting in all things, the character of Christ," Whelan pointed her audience to the use of a tool developed by Belem Leaders (2023): *Guiding Principles for Practitioners: AI Commitments and Best Practices* (K. Whelan, personal communication, November 7, 2024). She further challenged practitioners to examine the guide's six pillars of commitments and understand how they can align their Christian faith while also using AI and stepping into the metaverse.

In building on a model of leadership development and specifically addressing feedback, Dr. Diane Wiater (2024) noted,

My premise is that in order for true leadership development to take place, the three elements are needed – training, mentoring, and coaching – and they need to be operating in the context of the leader's experience. These work together in leader development; when done right and well, they honor the leader. All three elements require feedback to function. I'll even take this further and suggest feedback is the fuel for the Golden Trifecta of Leadership Development; training, mentoring, and coaching are all relational. When the leader is honored, they can flourish. When the leader flourishes, there's a pathway for followers and the organization to flourish as well. (D. Wiater, personal communication, November 7, 2024)

These summaries of the PCR's recorded presentations introduce the reader to the heart of the presenter's content, forming a foundation for the remainder of the conversations highlighted in this article.

Engaging the Audience: Thursday Night Opening Comments

Building on where the presentations left off, the live panel, *Expanding Contexts of Coaching*, began with the presenters introducing themselves and sharing the hopes and intentions behind their presentations.

Schardt (2024) stated,

I hope that I will increase awareness of the challenges that healthcare executives face in the pursuit of professional excellence, because healthcare strives for perfection, and as such, so do their leaders. ... Coaches must understand the baseline and origins of their beliefs that are grounded in perfection. It is essential we partner and help them create self-awareness, confidence, and the strength to be excellent while pursuing perfection. (D. Schardt, personal communication, November 14, 2024)

Tamakloe (2024) opened his comments,

My intent at the end of this presentation and this roundtable is to be able to just have people have a paradigm shift on how, as leaders, we can overcome the challenges that we face as leaders through connecting with a mind of Christ, be empathetic with those that we coach, and understanding that leaders also need coaches to help attain the level of self-awareness, because we all have blank spots. ... the intent for today, to make sure that we have that part of the shift. (P. Tamakloe, personal communication, November 14, 2024)

Humphries (2024) noted, "My hope is that just one person reviews the case study and becomes a believer in the power of Jesus Christ, the power of coaching, and is able to experience the human flourishing that comes with that intentional combination" (B. Humphries, personal communication, November 14, 2024).

Wheatley Pearson (2024) opened her comments with,

My goal is to empower and equip faith-based organizations, as well as individuals, to transform and change. When life and death is set before us, we have a choice. I believe that when you empower people, you give them an opportunity that they're able to experience phenomenal change. (D. Wheatley Pearson, personal communication, November 14, 2024)

Walker (2024) noted,

I'll be presenting on the effective leader is model, which is a leadership model that I developed shortly after graduating there from Regent University, and it

looks at leadership from four different perspectives with the effective leader being impactful, fair, strategic, and balanced. And tonight, my hope is that I'm able to connect that to human flourishing and to help leaders to understand how important it is for us to flourish as individuals, to reconnect to that place of purpose, and how that is going to be able to be put in place, to help us transform businesses and the world. (L. Walker, personal communication, November 14, 2024)

Brown (2024) added her opening comments,

I am doing a study on student achievement partners for our academics, for our students that are on some form of academic alert. And so it is a project that I've been working on now for about 2 years and so excited to announce that we've been having an 80% success rate. ... it's my belief that when we bring students in and we accept them, that we are co-creators of their success, and making sure that we partner with them from admissions through to graduation. (S. Brown, personal communication, November 14, 2024)

Whelan (2024) added,

This presentation is about creating space for human flourishing via the metaverse ... the hope for this presentation is to pique the interest of the metaverse ... give others the opportunity to see and hear how we can use this alternate world to still invite our clients into a safe space, so flourishing can happen within. (K. Whelan, personal communication, November 14, 2024)

Partnership to Flourishing

Coaching is the vehicle that creates space for the client to flourish. Within flourishing, we talk about relationships. Creating space for the coaching relationship to flourish through establishing psychological safety and trust allows the client to then explore their own flourishing. (K. Whelan, personal communication, November 26, 2024). From a previous Research Roundtable Proceedings article, Whelan (2022) notes "While not all encompassing, psychological safety is measured by how safe a person feels to openly share their ideas, thoughts, and aspirations without fear of retaliation. Coaching is relational; we must create a space where we serve people well" (p. 8).

What follows in this segment are summaries of each participant's contributions to conversations about flourishing.

Walker (2024) highlighted the use of her model to identify leadership styles and their organizational impact, emphasizing the importance of trust in leadership. She noted

that leadership-style surveys play a crucial role in helping leaders recognize their strengths, guiding them through coaching to foster growth and success in specific areas.

Tamakloe (2024) as far as flourishing we have to understand what flourishing really is for the coachee and my understanding of flourishing, for the coachee is being able to see where the coachee is, where they desire to be, and how we can partner together. He emphasized the use of leadership and health and wellness assessments, encompassing physical, social, emotional, and spiritual dimensions to help clients identify gaps and areas for change. He also noted the importance of the coach and client recognizing which stage of change the client is in: pre-contemplation, contemplation, or prepared to change.

Schardt (2024) stressed the importance of tools in her coaching practice, particularly the emotional intelligence tool, which she uses to assess stress management, self-expression, decision-making, interpersonal relationships, and self-awareness. She highlighted how these tools help clients identify their strengths, weaknesses, and blind spots, fostering self-awareness and accountability. Schardt's passion for her "One Word leadership" approach simplifies focus, aiding clients in developing skills for meaningful change and flourishing in their personal and professional lives.

Wheatley Pearson (2024) added the importance of leaders being willing to learn continuously to avoid stagnation and foster growth for themselves and their organizations.

Humphries (2024) highlighted the importance of trusting relationships with an internal coach, emphasizing the power of accountability and the ability to nurture and encourage growth through informal coaching relationships. She observed significant flourishing occurring even without a formal coaching structure.

Brown (2024) offered that flourishing stems from the belief that each student has a God-given purpose and destiny, with coaching serving as the means to uncover their potential and divine purpose. She highlighted the need to go beyond simply valuing students or offering traditional support, advocating for reimagined approaches to support that foster growth and enable students to truly flourish.

Whelan (2024) addressed the importance of leadership development in building confidence and highlighted that helping people flourish begins with giving them permission to do so. She noted that individuals often need to hear that someone is willing to engage in such a conversation with them. She also stressed the value of coaching in supporting clients' sense of purpose and working with them toward fulfilling that purpose.

In a collaborative conversation with the other presenters, Wiater (2024) noted,

It is not ours, as coaches, to say what flourishing is for our clients, no matter where their faith is. Ours is to be the vessel, serve the client, believe in the client, and be present with the client. We can only expand our capacity as noble vessels by being in God's presence and through obedience to Him. (D. Wiater, personal communication, November 27, 2024)

Christian Coaching

During the *Expanding Contexts of Coaching* live panel, Dr. Whelan asked the panelists the question, "What is Christian coaching?" This is a season where SBL faculty have been encouraged to press into and experiment with AI. Therefore, responses from panelists were extracted and fed into ChatGPT with the instructions to create a definition of Christian coaching with bullet points. Below is an edited, AI-generated working definition of Christian coaching.

Christian coaching is a collaborative relational process focused on fostering growth, purpose, and transformation through a Christ-centered approach. This process relies on a unique combination of supportive partnership, trust, self-awareness development, and faith-based, Holy Spirit guidance. (OpenAI, 2023)

While the definition of Christian coaching needs attention, the output above demonstrates the power of AI in synthesizing large amounts of text and generating a meaningful outcome. The attention needed is Holy Spirit inspiration, human touch, input, and collaboration.

Live Panel Context and Foundation

Throughout the PCR's two live panels, Wiater noted coaching as a profession of hope, redemption, restoration, and reclamation. The latter two claims may seem incongruent with what those of us in the profession work so hard to make known – coaching is future-focused. We do not go back, we look forward. Hope is forward. Hope is expectation! In the live panel *Expanding Contexts of Coaching*, Wiater noted that her reason for becoming a coach was to help others in fulfilling their dreams. That was early language of Christian coaching nearly 30 years ago. As shared from the presenter's content, coaching helps clients dream, dream again, understand purpose, remove barriers keeping them from fulfilling purpose, living on purpose, becoming their best self, and "living their dreams."

In the Professional Coaching Call for Abstracts, we emphasized that the theme of the 2024 Regent Roundtables seemed "tailor-made for the profession of Coaching." (Regent University 2024 Annual Research Roundtables, 2024). Coaching is an honoring partnership that helps clients understand their purpose and calling. Taking that thought

further, we ask, can leaders flourish without experiencing and participating in the leadership development partnership of coaching?

Future Research

In closing the article *An Advancing Profession: Teams, Trends, and Technology in Coaching: Chair Narrative Reflections on the 2022 Regent University School of Business and Leadership Professional Coaching Roundtable*, Wiater (2022) issued a call to coaching “practitioners and researchers to partner for research, model development, and more case studies utilizing assessments, demonstrating processes and coaching models, particularly concerning the following areas” (2022, p. 10). Those areas are presented in Table 1 and include three areas covered and forwarded by 2024 PCR presenters: honoring individual uniqueness, coaching as a leadership development tool, and communication skills in coaching effectiveness. While likely unintentional, this demonstrates the expanding contexts of coaching and the growing intentionality of researchers and practitioners to capture and write about the trends, results, and expectations in the field. The full table demonstrates that the presenters, intentionally or not, addressed various domains expressed in that call. In one presentation, Whelan (2024) addressed all eight areas of the 2022 call in a historical and groundbreaking presentation experimenting in the metaverse titled *Creating Space for Human Flourishing: Partnering with the Metaverse in Coaching*.

Noticeable to the chair, the 2024 Roundtable included a variety of contexts represented by the presenters. Also evident was the need for researcher and practitioner collaboration. To forward research momentum, change is needed, as the practitioners are solopreneurs, entrepreneurs, and business owners working on their businesses. Researchers need to develop and replicate quantitative and qualitative means of measuring coach behavior, heart, and skill, coaching processes, client experience, and coaching outcomes including client flourishing.

Table 1

2024 Professional Coaching Roundtable Recorded Presentations and Alignment with 2022 Chair Continuing Call

Presenter	Intergenerational workplace productivity	Global and team impact use, value, and disruption of technology in coaching	Honoring individual uniqueness	Communication skills in coaching effectiveness	The use of coaching in education	Coaching as a leadership development tool	Developing trust and psychologically safe environments	Virtual coaching competencies
Brown, S.			X	X	X	X	X	
Humphries . B.	X		X	X		X	X	
Wheatley Pearson, D.			X	X		X		
Schardt, D.	X		X	X		X	X	
Tamakloe, P.			X	X		X		
Walker, L.			X	X		X	X	

Presenter	Intergenerational workplace productivity	Global and team impact use, value, and disruption of technology in coaching	Honoring individual uniqueness	Communication skills in coaching effectiveness	The use of coaching in education	Coaching as a leadership development tool	Developing trust and psychologically safe environments	Virtual coaching competencies
Whelan, K.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Wiater, D.			X	X		X	X	

Note. Data collated from participants' recorded roundtable presentation scripts.

The 2021–2024 PCR calls for abstracts, advance the Regent University mission of Christian Leadership to Change the World and recognize expanding contexts and the influence coaching has on individual growth, leadership development, teams, and organizations. The call remains for practitioners who are researchers and researchers who are practitioners to partner in capturing and publicizing coaching impact. Questions and curiosities abound: What is working and why? Who is affected when individuals are coached? What are coaches doing to bolster their coaching practice and presence? Let us work together to create coaching models, develop research that demonstrates evidence of coaching impact, and generally make known how coaching, when done right and well, leads to human flourishing.

Closing message

In closing, allow Whelan's message to all attendees at the *Partnerships of Honor: Expanding Contexts of Coaching* live panel to minister to you and inspire you to action.

I would just like to ... remind everyone that you have been uniquely made by God, that you were created on purpose for a purpose, and you have permission to flourish, to lead with confidence and create impact in your world in your sphere ... you have been entrusted with so much; God has given you so much. Don't be afraid to step out and into what's ahead of you. (K. Whelan, personal communication, November 14, 2024)

About the Authors

Dr. Diane Wiater serves as the chair of the 2024 SBL Professional Coaching Roundtable. With more than 25 years of experience in training and teaching coaches, Dr. Wiater is a coach's coach and leader in developing Christian coaches. Dr. Wiater is a certified Gallup® Strengths Coach and is certified to administer the MBTI. As founder and CEO of Wiater Consulting Group, LLC, Dr. Wiater is a trusted strategic partner, profitable business manager, and effective leader developer. Her passion is seeing leaders grow, thrive, lead well, and flourish! Dr. Wiater is also a Belem Leaders partner. She earned her Ph.D. in Organizational Leadership from Regent University, a Christian academic faith community where she serves as adjunct faculty in the School of Business and Leadership.

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Appendix A

Regent University SBL Annual Research Roundtable Themes 2019-2024

2019 - SBL Annual Research Roundtable theme: *Advancing the Kingdom*

Professional Coaching theme: *Raising the Bar*

2020 - No roundtables due to the pandemic

2021- SBL Annual Research Roundtable theme: *Continue the Mission*

Professional Coaching theme: *An Advancing Profession: Teams, Trends, and Technology in Coaching*

2022 - SBL Annual Research Roundtable theme: *Continue the Mission*

Professional Coaching theme: *An Advancing Profession: Teams, Trends, and Technology in Coaching*

2023 - SBL Annual Research Roundtable theme: *20 Years of Continuing the Mission*

Professional Coaching theme: *Coaching Advances, Leadership Development, Trends, Teams, and Technology*

2024 - SBL Annual Research Roundtable theme: *Human Flourishing – Its Role in Business & Leadership*

Professional Coaching theme: *Partnerships of Honor*



The Effective Leader is Impactful, Fair, Strategic, Balanced, and Equipped to Flourish

Dr. Lakeisha Walker, LCMHC, CTRP

Bridge of Hope Life Transformational Services, LLC

Professional Coaching: Partnerships of Honor

Roundtable: Professional Coaching

Abstract

Flourishing does not occur by chance; it occurs by effort. And growth transpires when the effort is purposeful and intentional. We face various challenges daily, and our perception of the challenges determines our actions. The mindset to flourish is often developed when one has been exposed to a view of thriving versus a view of stagnation. Thinking in a stagnated way overexerts the brain. One who struggles with human flourishing could also struggle with professional flourishing, thus hindering effective business decisions and leadership efforts. The leader's mindset is the driving force of leadership activities. Leaders increase self-awareness, harness abilities, increase performance, shift mindsets, and are equipped to effectively lead with the interjection of coaching. When utilized in the coaching aspect, *the effective leader is* leadership development model assesses leadership capacity based on one's ability to be impactful, fair, strategic, and balanced. Leaders are assisted with identifying and developing skills that equip them to identify and develop skills in others. That is the power of coaching, human flourishing, its role in business and leadership, and the implementation of The Effective Leader is Leadership Development Model™.

Keywords: leadership, coaching, human flourishing, mindset shifts

Introduction

Each second someone makes a decision that will either support the act of flourishing or the act of dwindling away. Merriam-Webster (n.d.) defined *flourishing* as marked by vigorous and healthy growth. To this end, a person who is flourishing exhibits behaviors of forward movement versus someone who is dwindling away and stagnating. As mindsets shift and perceptions are reevaluated, the path towards transformation is cleared. Since a thought and an emotion are at the seat of every

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decision, the notion of shifting and reevaluation are both vital because when coupled together one's mindset is formed. In this manner, coaching is introduced as a tool to assist with self-awareness, which enhances decision-making skills. The Effective Leader Is Leadership Development Model™ was created to assess one's capacity for impactful, fair, strategic, and balanced leadership and when used as a four-tiered coaching tool, leaders gain insight into areas of personal and professional flourishing.

Four-Tiered Coaching Tool

Tier 1: The Effective Leader is Impactful™

To begin, it is important to understand that positive impact organically happens when leaders operate from a space of purpose and authenticity. The initial step in moving towards this said space of purpose is to identify one's leadership style, which occurs within this first tier. This leadership development model administers the Leadership Styles Questionnaire by SAGE Publications Inc. to measure authoritarian, democratic, and laissez-faire leadership styles. The first tier lays the foundation of leadership framework considering that it is the leadership style that shapes one's voice and directly impacts the culture of the organization. Too, leaders are taught strategies for building credibility and trust, which are both crucial in terms of impactful and effective leadership as well as in shaping organizational culture that is conducive to high work performance. Altes (2024) indicated,

From fostering open communication to creating a solid organizational culture, building emotional safety, inspiring leadership within teams and positively impacting mental health—trust is the thread that weaves through the tapestry of effective leadership. As professionals navigate the complexities of their roles, they would do well to recognize trust as not just a trend but an enduring principle that can transform individuals, teams and organizations. ("Conclusion," para. 1)

A leader who attempts to mirror the style of another leader will hinder personal and holistic flourishing, as flourishing is strangled by a lack of a leader's ability to lead from a place of inner security. When leaders are unable to grasp inner security, one could consequently struggle with managing power. A lack of power management could possibly create discord and tension, thus negatively impacting performance and growth. Leaders who have a high self-concept find it easy to delegate responsibility, create synergy, earn respect from others, and self-manage. This type of leader will find it easy to walk in personal power, which is given because of the rapport that the leader has with staff members versus position power or position leadership, which is granted just because of the leadership role that the leader is assigned to fulfill.

An impactful leader studies one's thoughts, emotions, actions, and needs. When faced with challenges, the leader is driven by the acknowledgement of how a leader's actions impact the actions of others and therefore chooses to self-manage. A secure leader has a high level of self-acceptance and knows one's story well enough to be honest with oneself. "Insecurity often leads to avoidance. People tend to be the most avoidant with their own flaws" (Vaynerchuk, 2021, p. 12). Vaynerchuk (2021) contended that when leaders recognize one's area of needed growth they often overcompensate in other areas to cover their insecurities.

Human flourishing is diametrically evident in the life of a leader who is impactful. It is difficult for an individual to function as an impactful leader if they do not learn how to take a different route to deal with personal roadblocks. It is like traveling on a familiar road only to arrive at a place in that road that is now under construction. Roadblocks are distractions to human flourishing while happiness, joy, contentment, and gratitude are all outward expressions of human flourishing. Let us take a Galatians 5:22 approach to human flourishing and impactful leadership as the leader walks in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control that are produced by the Holy Spirit. An organization can flourish when it is led by a leader who is flourishing. "As leaders achieve greater self-awareness and greater inner security, their need for control and outward security diminishes greatly" (Roberts, 2012, p. 81).

Coaching can then be implemented to aid in leadership development that is focused on value-based goal setting, inclusion, creating buy-in, rapport building, etc. Lewis (2022) reported, "When trust is instilled in an organization, tasks get accomplished with less difficulty because people are more likely to collaborate and communicate with each other in productive ways. As a result, outcomes tend to be more successful."

The effective leader who is impactful understands that there are universally desired traits of highly effective leaders. These traits are introduced and expounded upon within the first tier as the leaders are taught the difference between a manager and a leader. A manager focuses on processes and system development; a leader focuses on employee development that results in organizational sustainability. For example, imagine working at XYZ Organization and a close loved one unexpectedly passes away. This death is not of a distant cousin, a great great great aunt, etc., but someone whose death will totally disrupt life as it has been. Instead of your supervisor offering condolences, they ask, "Will you be at work tomorrow?" This supervisor is leading as a manager who is concerned about business processes. The employee needs the supervisor to lead as a leader and show some concern for their personal situation.

Leadership impact is felt and has an ongoing influence on individuals when the leader understands the process of leadership and is interactive, inclusive, open to the

viewpoints of others, creates unity, encourages expressiveness, and inspires commitment. “Leadership is a relationship between those who aspire to lead and those who choose to follow. A relationship characterized by mutual respect and confidence will overcome the greatest adversities and leave a legacy of significance” (Kouzes & Posner, 2012, p. 30). At the foundation of effective leadership is a leader who is impactful.

Tier 2: The Effective Leader is Fair™

What does fairness look like in leadership actions? As leaders progress to the second tier of this leadership development model, it is imperative that attention is given to the individuals’ strengths, needs, personal dynamics, and areas of growth as well as the needs of the organization to develop conflict resolution skills, understand change, increase motivation, and move from recruiting to retaining. Potential is unlocked, impact is maximized, and genuine connections are established when leaders are viewed, supported, heard, and understood as individuals versus from a focus that is merely through the lens of their role within the organization.

For example, a previous coaching client indicated that she noticed that her work performance decreased after undergoing a situation that resulted in a feeling of being unappreciated and devalued. The content within this tier highlights improving feedback discussions, addressing performance concerns, identifying blind spots, and tackling the elephants in the room.

It’s a myth that managers need to treat all their employees equally. In reality, they need to treat their employees equitably. There’s a big difference between the two, and one that the managers of the future will need to understand as they increasingly move the work to the people instead of the people to the work. (Field et al., 2023, p. 205)

For a biblical reference, Proverbs 16:11 (*New Living Translation [NLT] Bible*, 2004) tells readers that “the Lord demands accurate scales and balances; he sets the standards for fairness.” Kitterman (2023) acknowledged the difficulty that is associated with creating a workplace environment that reflects fairness based on everyone’s perception of fairness: “Fairness is a top driver for employees to give extra effort in their job, a key element for innovation and productivity” (para. 7).

Coaching plays a role in driving fairness; it bridges the disconnect between the skills individuals possess and the skills needed that contribute to a change in action. This leadership development model utilizes the Leadership 360 Leadership Development Needs Assessment to identify strengths and to assess the needs of leaders. Stoltzfus (2005) echoed, “Coach training is about upgrading your conversational and relational

skills” (p. 45). This is the heart of coaching, and it is at the heart of the effective leader who demonstrates fairness.

Tier 3: The Effective Leader is Strategic™

Strategic is more than a buzz word and entails clear and forward thinking that will develop futuristic and long-term stability strategies, assess systems and structures and their relationship to success, build teams with equipped leaders who understand needs and growth, and develop a succession plan versus a replacement plan. Branding happens within this third tier. A business leader must learn from the past (possess hindsight), live in the present (possess insight), and think towards the future (possess foresight) while remaining true to the core of the organization’s identity if success and sustainability is the overall goal. A leader who is strategic understands that change is inevitable. As I often express, it requires focus to build while shifting. Strategic thinking makes it possible for leaders to build (work, remain connected, operate, function, etc.), while shifting (thinking about and moving towards what is next), and deploy strategic actions.

Additionally, there is a level of customer focus that is present when leaders are strategic. A leader who is customer-focused is often prepared for crisis moments. Look at Chick-fil-A. This franchise leads with the guest (their term for *customer*) in mind. They implemented double-line ordering that included crew members waiting outside to take the guest’s order as part of their restaurant’s day-to-day service delivery. The COVID-19 pandemic demanded a change in business practices because of social distancing. Chick-Fil-A was one of few restaurants that did not have to scramble to change because of strategic thinking and strategic implementation beforehand. An inability to think strategically hinders flourishing. Strategic thinkers utilize both sides of their brains to make action steps.

Leaders who are strategic use the logic and analytical thinking associated with left-side brain functions and marry it to creativity and imagination that are associated with right-side brain functions to be trailblazers. Often, leaders who are strategic view the world differently and introduce concepts that are foreign and prematurely rejected. Take note that the rejection is usually not based on the effectiveness of the concept but mainly because it is a new concept. Innovation is stunted by leaders who are not strategic.

Life experiences have proven that one thing is true as I quite often convey: It is human nature to rebel against a new concept instead of embracing it. Nehemiah teaches that change creates opposition, and resilience is built when we remain focused through times of distress. Nehemiah 4:17 specifically tells us that the laborers carried on their work with one hand supporting their load and one hand holding a weapon. The power

of ignoring the opinions of others, the strength to move forward, the wisdom to be watchful, and the power to keep building speak to the actions of strategic leaders.

Coaching unlocks the greatness within and prepares the way for flourishing to sprout. However, there is a prerequisite I refer to as *Unlearning 101*. This requires a mindset shift from certain belief systems that stunt growth.

Without strategic leadership, companies have a weak foundation. As the business grows, there is no strong structure rooted to the ground to prevent things from caving in. If your company isn't practicing strategic leadership, you're putting everyone in harm's way. (Baker, 2022, see para. 6)

Several well-known companies were forced to close their doors because of an inability to shift business practices and services to meet current trends and customer needs. Epifano and Ross (2024) revealed nine companies that failed to adapt, which caused their demise. In 2008, Blockbuster's CEO referenced RedBox and Netflix and commented that they were not even on the competition radar screen. An online business presence and digital transformation were both beginning to heighten, and Blockbuster failed to use insight and foresight to make a strategic forward shift. Within 2 years following the CEO's comment, Netflix was taking pieces of Blockbuster's profit, and the company filed for bankruptcy with \$900+ million debt. To attest to the value of strategic leadership, Baker, 2022, see para.1) stated,

Strategic leadership happens when a leader shares a vision and goal with their team and inspires them to work together to reach it. A strategic leader often acts as the motivating force for an organization, letting individuals know their role in achieving the vision.

Coaching assists leaders with clearing their individual vision and sharpening their vision of the organization's next step and directions. Goldsmith et al. (2012) shared that coaches aid in helping leaders to position themselves to identify future organization strategic issues. A strategic leader can benefit from coaching because strategic influence is an ongoing process that requires continual revision.

Tier 4: The Effective Leader is Balanced™

At this point within the coaching process, the leader has increased understanding of one's leadership style and the correlated leadership impact, has developed skills to operate equitably and fair, has shifted one's mindset to think and thus act strategically, and has the tools that are necessary to excel as an effective leader who is balanced. A balanced leader is at the brink of flourishing. This leadership development model analyzes balanced leadership from a personal and professional perspective. We begin with personal balanced leadership. Self-awareness and self-concept as introduced in the

first tier connect with self-worth in this fourth tier to teach leaders how to set healthy boundaries around things that are important to them by beginning with oneself.

Leaders are always expected to know the answer and to be readily available. Do you know that the issue does not reside within that expectation? Rather, it resides in the thought process of the leader who believes it and then acts upon that belief. The issue is that leaders often struggle with caring for themselves and attending to personal needs such as wellness and personal care. True self-care goes beyond taking a day off work once every quarter or beyond. It goes beyond treating oneself to a spa day or to something new. These are actions of self-love, which is the basis for self-care. As often as I hear leaders complain about not having time for self-care I respond in the same manner: If you don't make time to stop, you're making time to die. Love yourself enough to make time to live.

Self-care is not selfish; it is necessary, and it is a lifestyle. A balanced leader has adopted self-care as a thought process and is cognizant of the fact that their peace of mind is a driving force for human flourishing. This tier has been instrumental in helping numerous leaders with making changes in their daily activities that resulted in an increased ability to function and self-manage. Healthy boundaries are easy to establish yet difficult to maintain. Maintaining healthy boundaries creates a balanced life. I define a boundary as being a self-erected barrier that protects things that are of value. Personal balance includes getting adequate rest, eating a balanced diet, exercising, practicing assertiveness, spending time alone, attending medical appointments, decluttering one's home/office/car/personal space, utilizing positive coping skills, taking breaks in between tasks and obligations, learning to say no, refraining from telephone usage, etc.

Leaders often burn out individuals prior to burning out professionally. When leaders ask for assistance with preventing burnout, they are challenged within this tier to identify their activities before and after their workday duties. This holds importance because a leader's executive functioning is at its highest capacity when one's lifestyle choices promote holistic wellness. One skill set involved in executive functioning is organization. A leader who is tired, overwhelmed, stressed, and anxious could struggle with organization and clutter. One's professional duties require a level of almost every skill that encompasses executive functioning. A lack of ability to fulfill job duties that require executive functioning could result in workplace turnover. Coaching is extremely valuable to the leader who is balanced. It assists with creating strategies for integrating personal and professional duties that results in an increased ability to properly manage.

As a coach, I created the Personal Treatment Plan (see Appendix) to highlight triggers or mood shifters such as anniversary dates of the death of loved ones, certain holidays, weather changes, smells, inability to get needs met, being yelled at, violent behaviors,

and so forth. Leaders are asked to identify times when their mood shifts such as appetite fluctuation, disturbed sleep patterns, crying, yelling, pacing back and forth, etc. Leaders are assisted with identifying positive coping skills that have proven effectiveness such as taking a walk, meditation, deep breathing, journaling, exercising, etc. The identification of personal pressure points and following through on an action plan for holistic wellness increases one's ability to prevent emotional disconnection, thus transforming into a balanced leader.

The severity and duration of emotional disconnection can bring about burnout and job dissatisfaction. Coaches can use several tools and checklists to assess one's level of burnout. The challenge is to identify toxic workplace environments, broken systems, unrealistic expectations, organizational structure changes, lack of growth opportunity, and other things that impact one's ability to flourish and achieve fulfillment. A lack of fulfillment creates thoughts of despair, which forces one to make decisions that are sometimes irrational and unhealthy. The tendency to make unhealthy decisions is greater when individuals are emotionally and physically depleted.

Although employees do not have the power to make organizational improvements, one does have the power to alert executives about the work conditions and the impact of such conditions on their well-being. Coaching on the executive level teaches leaders how to respond to feedback in the second tier of this model. Implementing other learned strategies will assist in ensuring the effective leader is balanced. The balanced executive leader works at reducing structural tensions on the professional design that will create stress on the personal design such as "how to allocate work (differentiation) and how to coordinate diverse efforts once responsibilities have been parceled out (integration)" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 52).

Human Flourishing, Coaching, Business, and Leadership Concluding Factors

Messer (2021) reported that human flourishing occurs as the good purposes of God are fulfilled for our lives. In this way, human flourishing has several dimensions, which "includes the dimensions of relationship with God, relationships with others, living a physically embodied and integrated life, and living out a particular vocation in a particular place and time" (Messer, 2021, p. 285). We were created to live a life of purpose, fulfillment, and joy. "While you're living, don't forget to live" is something I always say as a reminder to others to tap into this life that was uniquely and individually created just for us! Jeremiah 29:11-14 (*NLT*, 2004) reminds us,

For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. In those days when you pray, I will listen. If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me. I will be

found by you," says the Lord. "I will end your captivity and restore your fortunes. I will gather you out of the nations where I sent you and will bring you home again to your own land.

There is a life of extreme impact that will start revolutions and movements because of coaching. Coaching not only empowers individuals, but it also equips individuals to gain the necessary skills for growth and development that lead to purpose and fulfillment. Jeremiah 29:11-14 unites human flourishing, coaching, business, and leadership. Verse 11 begins with an introduction of the flourishing life that was created for us. Human flourishing is connected to making purpose-filled actions versus fulfilling immediate needs. As humans, we fill based on how we feel. This means that we fill spaces in our lives based on how we feel emotionally. Human flourishing is birthed from purpose-filled actions.

As leaders, when there are times of uncertainty, God promises to respond. Coaches do not necessarily provide answers but rather encourage accountability, focus on the individual's place of destiny, build capacity within, foster change, and help to keep individuals accountable. "Coaching teaches people how to train for the race of life. Life runners need to keep their eyes fixed on Jesus" (Collins, 2002, p. 96). Figure 1 reveals a powerful message about the core of coaching. Coaches take joy in assisting individuals with fulfilling their destiny. One's destiny is worth the work of unlocking the potential within because potential equals power when it is unlocked.

Leaders should aspire to not only lead but to lead effectively. The Effective Leader is Leadership Development Model has been key in challenging leaders to answer the call to impactful, fair, strategic, and balanced leadership. This leadership development model is a value-driven model that aims to enhance motivation for developing trust, increasing leadership skill set and capacity, cultivating a growth-centered environment, establishing clear communication channels, promoting innovation, mobilizing others, positively influencing team-building efforts, aligning vision and goals with human abilities, and creating balance and high work performance cultures. An individual who is flourishing becomes a leader who leads with a mindset of growth, transformation, empathy, vision, self-management, and insight. Will you answer the call to human flourishing while preparing to be an effective leader?

Figure 1*The Key*

About the Author

Dr. Lakeisha Walker is a sought-after speaker, leadership strategist, wellness advocate, and professional development facilitator. She is also an Ordained Evangelist, a Licensed Clinician Mental Health Counselor, and a Certified Trauma Practitioner. She earned a Doctor of Strategic Leadership with a concentration in Leadership Coaching from Regent University. She is the Executive Officer of Bridge of Hope Life Transformational Services and enjoys assisting leaders with increasing capacity, which is felt through the business motto Restoring Life to Seemingly Lifeless Situations. She is passionate about people development and purpose fulfillment as being manifested via mindset shifts, personal wellness, transformed behavior, and improved lifestyle choices. Lead Leader! “Don’t lose hope! It’s not beyond repair, it just needs restoring” as I often say to drive change.

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Appendix

_____’s

Personal Treatment Plan

Directions: There are no right and wrong answers so please take a moment to honestly learn and evaluate yourself.

Date:	Printed Name:	Signature:
Triggers What are some things that shift your mood? What creates anxiety, stress, anger, depression, etc. for you?		
Changes How do you or someone else know that your mood has shifted? What changes within your body or behavioral patterns?		
Positive Coping Skills What are some things that help you with self-management? What calms you down? What helps to relax you?		



Human Flourishing Through Succession Planning: An Owner, Successor, and Organizational Journey of Growth Through Coaching Initiatives

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Roundtables: Professional Coaching

Abstract

Most small businesses in America fail, because when a person achieves a certain level of skill and proficiency in a trade or concept, they believe that talent and proficiency will transfer into a successful business. While this business owner proved to be an exception, he made up for his lack of business acumen and competencies by building trusting relationships with his clients. He was known for his resilience, quality workmanship, and ability to take on the most challenging projects others said could not be done. Enter the hurdles, hardships, and blessings of succession planning. In the case of this business enterprise, the motivators, leadership style and communication methods of the owner and successor do not align, creating a mismatch in the transition of power. Additionally, the owner lacks communication skills, the discipline to hold others accountable, and the knowledge to act as a mentor to the successor. This value misalignment between the owner and the successor and lack of an intentional succession plan has created a sticking point, bringing the organization's forward progression to a halt. This organizational case study serves as a guide to facilitate a triumphant succession transition that develops and nurtures life-long partnerships while establishing best practices in communication and leadership that honor not only the subcontractor industry and concrete profession, but also the employees, their families, and their communities, leaving behind a legacy for generations to come. It is through coaching that true human flourishing will carry the organization through the succession process.

Keywords: human flourishing, executive coaching, succession planning, competency gap

Introduction

The transition from master craftsman to business owner was an arduous one. The owner's resiliency was on full display as he got a crash course in starting a small

business from the ground up with nothing but a pickup truck and a few men from his home garage. Through grit, determination, and the relentless pursuit of success, he refused to quit. With the spirit of an entrepreneur refusing to fail, he sacrificed everything necessary to become a successful business owner. With no formal business-related education, he learned every lesson imaginable the hard way, yet he persevered. Nineteen years later, he finds himself ready to focus on his family. Now, as a successful owner of multiple organizations, he is prepared to withdraw from business ownership's day-to-day, hands-on tasks.

Enter the hurdles, hardships, and blessings of succession planning. Research tells us that most small businesses in America fail because when a person achieves a certain level of skill and proficiency in a trade or concept, they believe that talent and proficiency will transfer into a successful business (Gerber, 1995). Unfortunately, studies have shown that most small business start-ups in the United States fail for many reasons, including, but not limited to, a lack of business acumen, practical leadership skills, and other deficient competencies (Gerber, 1995; Haltiwanger, 2022). While the owner proved an exception, he made up for his lack of business acumen and competencies by building trusting relationships with his clients. He was known for his resilience, quality workmanship, and ability to take on the most challenging projects others said could not be done.

While the owner has grown personally and professionally, stepping back from the business requires proficiency in many competencies that he has not yet focused on. While his growth has been an honor to watch, support, and facilitate, specific fundamental leadership and communication challenges are plaguing the succession process. A successor has been identified through organic means. Yet, the owner's ability to effectively communicate his expectations to his successor is causing significant hardship and exhausting frustration that continues to impact morale. Fundamentally, the owner is driven by and focuses on building relationships with those he comes into contact with, while his successor is task-oriented and manages with a more dictatorial style, versus the owner's influential approach through serving others.

Using psychological assessments, such as TTI Success Insights, leadership questionnaires, skills inventories, values assessments, 360 surveys, and others, the data validates the painful hurdles and hardships the entire organization feels from the disconnects in leadership and communication style in the transition from the owner to his successor. The blessings the owner and the organization long for will only come to fruition with bilateral coaching for the owner and his successor, as well as a team coach to bring it all together. This case study describes the desperate journey of a master craftsman-turned-successful entrepreneur who longs to enjoy raising his family while participating at a distance as his organizations continue to thrive.

This Midwest subcontractor (MS) is a single member limited liability corporation who established the organization from his residence in 2007. Collectively, with a group of five other craftsmen, he began his business as a master craftsman. He founded his organization with grit, hard work, dedication, determination, and the relentless pursuit of meeting his clients' needs while exceeding their expectations. As he expanded the organization, his success led to the birth of two subsidiaries: both MSs in the construction industry.

The owner has not limited his enterprise to the construction industry. With continued success, he established multiple rental and commercial real estate property entities to use as investment opportunities. He has taken his success through the pursuit of excellence and amassed an enterprise worthy of emulation, establishing himself as an industry-leading, community-minded contributor who has overcome adversity both personally and professionally. He and his staff take pride in wearing the company's logo that is well-earned by those it adorns. This MS has grown to be a highly competitive organization, leading the industry in the local and surrounding areas.

In the following case study, I will share the trials and tribulations of a successful organization's journey through the succession planning process. While the days remain long and burdensome, there is much to be said for the blessings of facilitating and witnessing human flourishing, even when the challenges seem unmanageable and overwhelmingly insurmountable.

Leaning into my Christian faith and lessons learned from my doctoral journey at Regent University, the relentless battle is being won, a transition of power is being successfully conducted, and my faith grows more profound as I enjoy the hardships and sleepless nights guided by God's patience, faith, and love for me and my entire organization. This case study serves as a reminder that, at times, the path God lays before us is not always guided by easy-to-understand directional signage. Frequently, the path is intentionally barely illuminated and without "turn here" neon lights.

Success on this journey has required a deeper level of faith than most have – a belief in what cannot be seen and cannot be explained. This experience has required soulful self-reflection and a piercing hope of what I intuitively believe is possible, even when the facts do not support common sense. Overwhelming faith in other human beings who likely do not share the same faith or vision is required. In pure servanthood to my stakeholders and employees, leaning on brilliant professors, subject matter experts, God, his Son, and the Holy Spirit, this case study makes sense of the illogical. In sharing this case study, I hope other professionals find comfort in the unknown, learn to appreciate that some hopeless endeavors are possible to achieve, and that this journey inspires a deeper level of love for others when facilitating the seemingly impossible through faith, love, and a servant's heart.

Organization Overview

This MS serves the needs of clients in the local vicinity and surrounding states. The MS does not chase work, but instead chooses to tend to its repeat clients' needs. The MS specializes in concrete industrial projects. Tearing out, then pouring back inside industrial facilities is their specialty. It is exceptionally well diversified with its ability to take on any challenge that includes multiple scopes of work.

Their list of clients is extensive. An analysis of their repeat clients shows that they perform exceptional work and have established a reputation worthy of note. Risk-taking remains in the blood of the MS. Recently, the organization took on a substantial project for the Army Corps of Engineers, which included a multistory elevator shaft. The MS does not appear to be self-limiting but rather takes calculated risks to evolve as their clients' needs change.

The enterprise's mission is "to meet the industrial concrete and tear out/pour back needs of the local and surrounding area, because we love a challenge and take pride in honest work." Assessment results and other traditional appendices have been removed to honor the confidentiality of the organizations involved.

Background

In 2016, the successor was hired by a subsidiary of MS. While the successor had no experience with this type of work, he showed great discipline and began to thrive. An organizational coach was called to assess the organization and felt the successor was a great asset. Approximately 18 months into the successor's time with the company, he transitioned into a new position as a project manager for MS. Without administrative experience, the successor entered the office setting and quickly became the go-to for the other office personnel and the owner. As time passed, the successor longed for more structure within the office team. Due to his ability to multitask and solve problems, the successor became the employee who relentlessly pursued solutions to ongoing challenges and became the one that others looked to for guidance. Strong in character and common sense, the successor thrived in task management, and the owner began to lean on him for daily management of employees and decision-making.

Years passed, and the successor grew to understand the MS's ways. In 2020, I joined the team to fill the role of office manager. The owner and the successor expressed specific concerns about removing the gray areas in decision-making and longed for the additional structure that would automate and alleviate some of their most common frustrations. I quickly realized that the most pressing needs were basic and simplistic. Eighteen months were spent generating updated human resource policies and many other essential means and methods that had not been formally documented. While

transitioning to a well-defined handbook was challenging, once implemented, there became a deep respect for the newfound boundaries, and most thrived within their respective roles. Starting the organization from his garage created a massive void in infrastructure, where a traditional start-up would likely begin with most of these processes already established.

Subsequent months were spent identifying administrative and field processes, job descriptions, and other significant procedures that were put in place to protect the employees, the organization, and our clients. Employees received well-defined lanes, an organizational chart was identified, and organizational values were reestablished to ensure they aligned with the company's core values. In 2022, the owner announced that he was ready to take a step back from the day-to-day tasks of ownership. With this step back came a flurry of challenges, miscommunications, and frustrations that began to wreak havoc on the organization.

Key Players

Owner, Midwest Subcontractor

Responsible for the overall success of the entire enterprise, which includes 12 limited liability companies. The MS and two other subsidiaries comprise the three most active organizations. The owner has transitioned from master craftsman to business owner and is looking to step back to a limited role, attending bi-weekly meetings and relinquishing the daily decision-making to those in key leadership roles.

Successor, Midwest Subcontractor

The successor serves as leadership liaison between the owner and members of all organizations. His primary focus is the day-to-day operations of the MS. His immediate reports include project management personnel, shop/maintenance teams, and field superintendents. Secondary to MS is his supervision of the two other construction-related subsidiaries.

Administrator, Midwest Subcontractor

In my role as the administrator, I serve as CFO and HRO across all organizations within the enterprise. My immediate reports are the three office managers representing the MS and two other construction-related subsidiaries. My other responsibilities include onboarding, participating in all safety-related incidents, and leading miscellaneous projects as determined by the owner. I work hand-in-hand with the organization's accountants, attorneys, and other subject matter experts the enterprise relies on for specialized needs.

Problem Statement

The challenge is multifaceted. The successor's motivators, leadership style, and communication methods do not align with the owner's, creating a mismatch in the transition of power from the owner to the successor. The owner lacks communication skills, the discipline to hold others accountable, and the knowledge to act as a mentor to the successor. There is a value misalignment between the successor and the owner. No intentional succession plan has been created to assess the successor's ability to take on the role, but instead, he has been elevated to his current position by default.

The owner finds comfort in what he is familiar with and fears the unknown. Although he recognizes the hurdles facing the organization's succession planning and his exit strategy, the owner admits that he struggles with the "MS Bermuda Triangle" the organization is in with the leadership mismatch and the seemingly endless cycles that have continued for the past 18 months of an organizationally productive week, giving him faith and promise followed by two weeks of hardships and head-scratching moments. Furthermore, the organization and enterprise are beginning to experience the long-term effects of the incongruence between leadership style and competency gaps of both the owner and the successor, causing continual turnover and the loss of repeat clients.

Organizational Goals

The problem impacts multiple organizational goals. The company was founded on and has continued to thrive through pandemics and other economic highs and lows because of repeat clients and the strong relationships the owner has built. To strengthen neglected and strained relationships, the organization requires a change in mindset, focusing on serving their clients and maintaining the connections to allow time to renew their commitments throughout their entire client base.

The organization's leadership wants to mitigate the incoming wayward traveling competition by saturating the market and solidifying the organizational ties as the go-to contractor of choice. The solution must include a heightened sense of brand recognition in the community through investing in and contributing to the betterment of residents, business owners, and others the organization serves. This should include showing appreciation to employees to renew and restore their faith and loyalty to the organization.

The organization's niche in the industrial sector must continue to grow through safety, teamwork, excellence, and passion—all staples of the organization's values. These traits, however, require the leadership's ability to influence the employees. This influence will only occur with strong and trusting relationships throughout the enterprise. Growing

the organization's industrial market sector must become a top priority. Ultimately, a heavy reliance is being placed on ownership to establish short-term, midrange, and long-term goals so that leadership can create a game plan on how the organization will achieve its goals.

The biggest challenge facing the enterprise is the lack of organizational goals. Recall that the owner began the company as a master craftsman without formal business experience. His initial efforts were all focused on survival, and goal setting was not a consideration, nor was there an understanding of its significance. While the organization has succeeded for 19 years, this is where the lack of business acumen, practical leadership skills, and other deficient competencies can no longer be overcome.

Analysis and Discussion

Nineteen years into successful business ownership of multiple organizations, the owner is ready to focus on his family and is prepared to withdraw from business ownership's day-to-day, hands-on tasks. He has worked diligently to ensure he has solidified trusted experts, employees, and a deep pool of repeat clients but has not initiated an intentional succession plan. Assumptions were made that the current operations manager could fill the role; however, this employee was elevated to his current position by default based on previous organizational circumstances.

Ownership's Leadership Style, Strengths, and Areas for Opportunity

The owner's primary leadership style is transformational; however, he exhibits an eclectic group of leadership behaviors encompassing many facets of several other leadership styles. Although his leadership behaviors are primarily based on his ability to influence others to accomplish above and beyond what they thought possible, his technical expertise, in conjunction with his task orientation, empowers those he leads to excel. In addition, his ability to self-regulate based on his strong moral values and ethics encourages followers to view him as authentic. Therefore, he can communicate candidly, which facilitates an honest and transparent relationship with his employees.

When assessing his specific behavioral attributes, it is apparent that the center of his attention is typically on goal accomplishment and exceeding expectations for his clients. He goes out of his way to make others feel comfortable around him, with one another, and in different situations. His tendency towards transformational leadership means he encourages creativity, acknowledges innovative suggestions, and has successfully crafted the organization's path. He inspires others as he engages with them, generating a connection that increases their motivation. He is highly charismatic, which produces a substantial following from those he comes into contact with.

He has successfully found balance with these leadership behaviors and continues strengthening bonds with existing relationships while developing new connections. This general review of his leadership style helps explain the basis for his personal and organizational success. His list of clients is extensive. His organizations do not appear to be self-limiting; instead, he takes calculated risks to evolve as his clients' needs evolve. His enterprise's efforts to continue long-standing client relationships are a testament to the success of his leadership style. Between 2022 and 2024, the owner completed four unique leadership questionnaires, each focusing on a specific facet of his leadership style.

Authentic Leadership Questionnaire

The Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ) was established in 2008 by a group of scholars led by Fred Walumbwa, et al. The questionnaire aims to determine how authentic and bona fide one's leadership skills are and whether one's leadership behaviors are perceived as trustworthy. The owner's ALQ assessment showed he has a high internalized moral perspective and high relational transparency. He has a strong understanding of his moral standards and does not easily allow others to persuade him. He consistently behaves in a manner that aligns with his beliefs and morals. This creates the perception that he is authentic and worthy of his followers' attention. He presents himself genuinely to others, and they perceive his transparent behavior as authentic. He often expresses his core feelings and motivations with others healthily. He reveals both his positive and negative attributes without filtering them. He communicates openly and is very real in his relationship with others.

Leadership Behavior Questionnaire

R. M. Stogdill established the Leadership Behavior Questionnaire (LBQ) in 1963 to determine whether leadership behavior and conduct aligned more with a task-focused or relationship-focused approach. Task-focused behaviors tend to center attention on goal achievement, while a relationship-focused approach prioritizes relationships with followers. The owner's LBQ assessment tells us he has a well-balanced focus on task-oriented and relationship-oriented behaviors, although he does slightly prefer task orientation. He successfully utilizes both approaches in his leadership style. He can shift dynamically between the task and the relationship, quickly changing focus as the situation demands. When he comes into a situation where his followers need guidance and significant direction, he is able to give precise instructions to achieve the goal at hand. Likewise, he is able to approach another person in need of guidance and determine if the needs are relational, then effectively redirect the person with a relational touch.

Skills Inventory

Robert Katz established the Skills Inventory (SI) in 1955. In this three-skilled perspective, this assessment focuses on three unique skills that emphasize the leader's capabilities, comprehension, and technical skills to determine one's ability to be an effective leader. The owner's SI assessment expresses a very high aptitude for his general technical knowledge in concrete and construction. The evaluation does show areas of opportunity with both his human and conceptual skills. He is highly proficient and should be considered a subject matter expert. He holds extensive knowledge regarding tooling, hands-on techniques, processes, and products.

An opportunity that arose from the owner's SI findings shows he has substantial room for development in both conceptual and people skills. He finds it difficult to work with others when he is required to work as part of a team to achieve a common goal. He is not sensitive to the needs of others, nor does he consider their needs in his decision-making. There may be times when he finds it difficult to get along with others. His ability to manage ideas and concepts should be a focus for future improvement. Working with abstract ideas and hypotheticals, primarily mental work, can be very challenging.

Transformational Leadership Inventory

The Transformational Leadership Inventory (TLI) questionnaire intends to determine one's preferred leadership style. It establishes whether he leads by transforming his followers using influence or focusing more on one-on-one transactional exchanges with them. This leadership inventory was created in 1990 (Podsakoff, et al.).

The owner's TLI questionnaire findings express that he is more of a transformational leader than a transactional one. He does, however, show transactional tendencies at a much lower rate than his transformational behavior. The owner is a highly charismatic man, and this unique gift allows him to achieve extraordinary things. His behavior is enhanced with this charismatic gift that impacts his followers incredibly and is motivational. He has a strong desire to influence others. He is confident and has a solid foundation, allowing others to see him as a robust role model. He communicates high expectations that his followers often adopt and consistently exhibits confidence in his followers' abilities to meet his expectations.

Successor's Leadership Style, Strengths, and Areas for Opportunity

Based on a 360-Degree Feedback Assessment, a summary of the main categories reflects several findings worth mentioning. While the successor's self-ratings were high in problem-solving and leadership skills, his direct reports perceived those skills with a much less favorable rating. Alternatively, the successor rated his interpersonal skills

much less favorably than did his direct reports. The successor's self-rating for his personal qualities, such as integrity and humility, were in direct alignment with his direct reports. It is clear that he sees a need for growth and improvement in building and nurturing relationships with those he leads, while a blind spot exists in the way the successor's direct reports perceive his abilities to solve problems. These findings are reinforced through the collective comments provided by his raters: "The successor is a great leader, planner and communicator. If there was one thing he can work on it is how he delivers those ideas." "He is young and has a ton of potential." "The successor's strengths are confidence, ability to help others, and thoroughness."

- **Personal Qualities:** The successor's self-ratings for each competency represented in this section reflect relative ratings to his direct reports. The most significant area for improvement is associated with a willingness to admit mistakes and learn from others. The successor is service oriented and performs with integrity, yet his raters find self-awareness as an area for growth.
- **Interpersonal Skills:** The successor's direct reports agree that he facilitates discussions effectively and encourages participation. Furthermore, the successor is seen as an effective communicator and listener. He is also perceived as successful in managing conflict and being sensitive to diverse cultures and viewpoints. The successor rated himself as lacking skills associated with conflict management, while his direct reports gave that competency the highest score of the entire grouping.
- **Problem Solving:** While the successor perceives his problem-solving skills as the highest of all competencies, his direct reports are not in agreement. They perceive his problem-solving skills as 34% (on average) lower than the successor rates himself. While the successor's systems thinking is viewed as a strength, his decision-making, ability to understand the depth and extent of the problem, and ability to drive change are all seen as areas of opportunity by his direct reports. A unique finding in the problem-solving category shows that his supervisor greatly appreciates the successor's ability to make decisions and commitment to driving change.
- **Leadership Skills:** While the successor's direct reports and supervisor align with his personal rating for consensus building and execution, a stark contrast exists between his direct reports and himself based on feedback associated with his ability to inspire a shared vision and develop a strategic plan to achieve specific goals.
 - "The successor is a hard worker and knows how to get things done - FACT"
 - "When planning or creating change there are times that a quick fix is made, the immediate problem is solved, but they feel unfinished at times, creating a different challenge or confusion."

While the successor rates his most significant areas for opportunity in practicing humility and conflict management, his direct reports only agree on the humility rating. Alternatively, while the successor rates himself low on his ability to manage conflict, his direct reports identify conflict management as one of his strong suits. The successor's supervisor shares his enthusiasm for the ability to make decisions and strives for continual improvement. The successor's supervisor perceives areas for improvement with strategic planning and conflict management.

The successor participated in a TTI Success Insights Assessment. The successor is goal oriented and driven by results. He is the team member who will try to keep others on task. Many people see him as a self-starter dedicated to achieving results. He needs to learn to relax and pace himself. He may expend too much energy trying to control himself and others. He has the ability to come up with new ideas and follow them through to completion. The successor is deadline conscious and becomes irritated if deadlines are delayed or missed. He likes people but can be seen occasionally as cold and blunt. He may have his mind on project results and sometimes may not take the time to be empathetic toward others. He establishes many standards for himself and others. His high ego strength demands that his standards will be met. He is a self-starter who likes new projects and is most comfortable when involved with a wide scope of activities. The successor likes to be forceful and direct when dealing with others. His desire for results is readily apparent to the people he works with. He is a creative person and uses this creativity to solve problems.

The successor likes setting the pace in developing systems to achieve results. He refrains from getting emotionally involved in decision-making. This allows him to make objective decisions. He likes the new and the unusual. He prefers to discover his solutions to problems. He sometimes gets so involved in a project that he takes charge. The successor has the unique ability to tackle tough problems and follow them through to a satisfactory conclusion. He should realize that, at times, he needs to think a project through, beginning to end, before starting the project. He can be direct in his approach to discovering the facts and data. He maintains his focus on results and is logical, incisive, and critical in his problem-solving activities.

The successor is skilled at asking informed questions and extracting information, but for some people, he may need to phrase his questions more tactfully. Sometimes he can become so involved with his work that he appears cool and aloof to others. He may lack the patience to listen and communicate with slower-acting people. He does not seek out conflict but will confront those who stand between him and success. He likes people who give him options, as compared to their opinions. The options may help him make decisions, and he values his own opinion over that of others. He is not influenced by people who are overly enthusiastic. He could improve his communication with others by being more flexible and showing a sincere interest in what they are saying. He may

benefit from exhibiting more patience and asking questions to ensure that others understand what he has said.

Based on a combination of assessments, the successor shows a preference for the following communication methods:

- Provide systems to follow
- Place goals and projects in writing with specific deadlines
- Specificity is key, so leave nothing to interpretation
- Be precise and clear
- Motivate using objectives and results
- Prefers a supervisor who makes quick decisions

Over the past 18 months, multiple challenges have surfaced. The successor's values, motivators, leadership style, and communication methods do not align with the owner's, creating a mismatch in the transition of power from the owner to the successor. The owner lacks communication skills and the discipline to hold others accountable. Additionally, he is unable to act as a mentor to the successor to ensure a smooth transition during the succession process. Furthermore, the organization and enterprise are beginning to experience the long-term effects of the incongruence between the owner and the successor's leadership styles and competency gaps.

The successor has many strengths and unlimited potential. His willingness to modify his behavior and thought processes to improve his leadership and communication skills is admirable. He is humble in one-on-one situations and can adjust to changes if they yield tangible results. The most significant challenge for the successor appears to be his inability to be consistent with his approaches. His work environment makes consistency challenging due to the constant onslaught of questions, alerts, and disruptions.

Possible Solutions

There are several possible solutions. While many of them will likely contribute to improving the problem, it is plausible that the most successful solution will include a combination of the suggested options and may include some considerations not listed. Possible solutions include, but are not limited to the following:

- Ownership may sell (whole or in part) the enterprise
- Terminate the successor and strategically replace with a successor who has appropriate competencies
- Relocate the successor to a position that is well suited based on his skill set
- Hire executive coaches for both the successor and the owner
- Hire a consultant to facilitate the goal-setting process

- Hire a team coach for the combined leadership team
- Take no action currently

Recommendations

In consideration of faith in the things we cannot see, the good we know exists inside us all, and our love for one another, the recommended solution should be a combination of nurturing our talents, supplementing our weaknesses with others' strengths, and growing our faith in our clients and employees. For this reason, my recommendations include the following:

- Hire two executive coaches to work with the owner and the successor to focus on enhancing their communication skills and improving areas of opportunity in leadership competencies
- Hire one team coach to facilitate the collective group's effectiveness
- Begin the strategic search for a consultant to facilitate the goal-setting process and evaluate the enterprise's preferred organizational culture and values

These recommendations should be considered due to the urgency and opportunity at this pivotal time when the enterprise is at one of its lowest points since inception. We are frequently more open to suggestions and change when we are most vulnerable and have nothing to lose. The humility is palpable, and while there is recognition that change is required, the data continues to show a level of urgency that the enterprise readily feels.

While firing the successor or selling the company appears to be the quickest path to change, there remains a deep level of respect for one another and the loyalty that each has after years of service within the enterprise that makes those options less palatable and the very nemesis of what we, the enterprise's leadership, are trying to accomplish. The employees are not just employees. They have become part of our lives and deserve the best we can give them. We cry together, get angry together, and love one another even when we act unlovable; these colleagues are anything but the typical employees. They, too, deserve to feel loved, cared for, and served so they can go home each night to serve their families, their communities, churches, and friends. Selling out or firing an employee would be a last resort.

Both the owner and the successor have shown immense growth in the past 18 months. While neither has been able to solve the challenges at hand, both have experienced intentional growth and improved the enterprise's state. Both acknowledge their professional shortcomings and areas of opportunity, which shows tremendous humility. A mutual willingness to continue the momentum of growth and development makes this an ideal time for human flourishing. My doctoral journey in strategic

leadership and personal and professional life experiences, combined with my Christian faith, creates a tremendous opportunity for me to act as an internal coach, as described by Hunt and Weintraub (2004) in *The Coaching Organization: A Strategy for Developing Leaders*. There are inherent limitations to acting as an internal coach, which emphasize the need for external executive and team coaches.

Plan

This plan takes time. Not days, weeks, or even a month or two. This plan requires a multi-phased approach, assuming the parties are willing to participate as readily as I hope. While bringing out the best in each other and the enterprise requires diligent effort and extreme awareness, there will be hesitation, pushbacks, and those unwilling to put in the time or effort. Those individuals will likely slow the process, yet that is to be expected. Change is difficult, at the least. Personal reflection and intentional interpersonal change are even more challenging to achieve.

Coaching helps others improve their performance and become their very best selves. The very core of coaching is genuine, unconditional listening, and from that comes a relationship. A coach works to build trust through supportive, strategic measures that facilitate the necessary changes to enhance leadership behaviors and should not be mistaken for solving problems. A coach works alongside the coachee to identify the root causes of the challenges, suggest options that maximize the coachee's strengths, and facilitate lifelong transformational behaviors. The coaching process is conversational and focuses uniquely on the content at hand. A coach's goal is to encourage a relationship with the coachee that includes a high-commitment, professional, growth-oriented focus with clear written goals and expectations.

Coaching increases an enterprise's value by accelerating personnel development. Furthermore, as the coach/coachee relationship deepens, the value becomes evident as the coachee adds skills to their day-to-day interactions, creating more efficient and effective leadership (Anderson & Anderson, 2005). With many tools at their disposal, a coach may select any number of tools to facilitate a coachee's development.

During an interview discussing team coaching and its importance, Dr. Kelly Whelan highlighted one of the most significant differences between a team coach and an individual coach (Bocarnea et al., 2023). Whelan identified a challenge that all team coaches face; they must be able to immediately coach in the moment. Individual coaching allows a coach to return to a situation after reflection, whereas a team coach is expected to intercede effectively and immediately on the spot. During the 2023 Regent University Research Roundtable, participants identified individual coaching as a one-on-one experience where the client directs each facet of the coaching engagement, and

the process is highly individualized, whereas team coaching requires multiple coaches and focuses on a shared approach and objective (Bocarnea et al., 2023).

Like many professions, the coaching industry offers opportunities for its professionals to achieve certification, which shows a higher level of standards and practices that can enhance the experience a coachee or organization may have due to the accreditation process. The European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC), the International Coaching Federation (ICF), and the Board-Certified Coach (BCC) are all certifying organizations that have enhanced the coaching profession through their respective accreditation process.

A consultant can help the enterprise modify its culture without compromising its ethics or values. Cameron and Quinn (2011) encourage us to pay close attention to ensuring consensus throughout the organization. As we work with a consultant to implement change, it is fruitless without employee buy-in and overall agreement about what cultural aspects will remain unchanged, which will be added, and which will be removed (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). Weiss (2011) states the fundamental purpose for consultants is to enhance the position of the client, leaving them in better condition once the goals are achieved. As such, the organization needs a consultant to establish strong relationships built on trust. The organization's needs are unique, and so are the methods a consultant can use.

Consultants must act ethically, recognize that someone is always watching, and extend enormous energy to the organization. The power a consultant wields requires trust built on the vulnerabilities inherent in human nature; hence, a consultant must constantly be ethical and uphold the values of the organization. A consultant must be mindful of each interaction, intentional about their word choice, and honor the organization's employees and beliefs. Northouse (2013) reminds us that situational context is intertwined with inclusivity. The organization's leadership must learn to focus on creating an atmosphere that heightens awareness of unique differences, values, and beliefs to harness the creativity and innovation that arise in challenging situations (Northouse, 2013). A consultant must consider each situation and the context in which it is occurring to facilitate organizational goals.

- **Phase I:** Identify two executive coaches and one team coach. Begin sessions as soon as possible with the successor and the owner to gain a clear understanding of the enterprise's needs and help establish the coaching goals. Identify a team coach to begin interviewing and working with team members to establish effective communication and expectations of the team. Have all coaches establish a suggested timeline and strategize on focus and next steps.

- **Phase II:** As coaching sessions begin, a consultant should be selected. The consultant should have extensive experience in problem-solving facilitation and knowledge of the construction industry.
- **Phase III:** While the team and executive coaching continue, the consultant should begin using whatever means and methods, such as organizational assessments, etc., to determine how he/she can best facilitate the brainstorming, conversations, and required next steps to establish a plan regarding the goal-setting process and evaluate the enterprise's preferred organizational culture and values.
- **Phase IV:** Executive and team coaching should continue as the consultant's suggestions are finalized and implementation occurs. A timeline should be established for the consultant's periodic check-in and to ensure the over-arching progress is successful. Continuing the executive and team coaching will be paramount until the enterprise's effectiveness becomes such that additional internal coaches are identified and there is stability throughout the enterprise.

Conclusion

With the spirit of an entrepreneur refusing to fail, the owner sacrificed everything necessary to become a successful business owner. With no formal business-related education, the owner learned every lesson imaginable the hard way, yet he persevered. Nineteen years later, he finds himself ready to focus on his family. Now, as a successful owner of multiple organizations, he is prepared to withdraw from business ownership's day-to-day, hands-on tasks.

Using psychological assessments such as TTI Success Insights, leadership questionnaires, skills inventories, values assessments, 360 surveys, and others, the data validates the painful hurdles and hardships the entire enterprise feels from the disconnects in leadership and communication style in the transition from the owner to the successor. Succession planning is one of the most difficult challenges an organization can face. When multiple key employees share a gap in leadership and business competencies, the difficulty in a successful transition becomes nearly impossible without outside expertise.

Coaching and consultants help others become their very best selves and perform better. As such, any tool that adds value towards accomplishing those fundamental goals should be considered. Both coaching and leadership require core competencies. Some of these appear to overlap, while others do not. Depending on the audience, a leader may deploy many leadership styles to achieve the organization's overall goals. One striking similarity between a coach and a leader is the opportunity to influence through whichever means their followers or coachees need to be successful. Coaches and leaders alike are more likely to achieve successful outcomes by developing relationships with

their coachee/followers to the extent they comprehend what drives the individual to perform at a higher level.

Through my research, the most influential coaches have all the qualities of a successful leader but have additional skills, such as a deep understanding of their core values, worldview, and powerful listening abilities that allow them to be in the moment and ask significant questions that lead to the coachee's self-efficacy, ultimately improving their quality of life through harnessing the potential that lies within. ICF competencies dictate that a coach empowers the client/coach to become their self-coach through the use of many applications, processes, approaches, and other applicable means to achieve human growth.

This organizational case study serves as a guide to facilitate a triumphant succession transition that develops and nurtures life-long partnerships while establishing best practices in communication and leadership that honor not only the subcontractor industry and concrete profession, but also the employees, their families, and their communities, leaving behind a legacy for generations to come. Adding a consultant to the process ensures the organizational values and culture are in alignment with the goals being set.

The challenge at hand is multifaceted. The disconnect and misalignment in leadership style, motivators, and values between the owner and the successor have wreaked havoc and do not allow the owner to proceed with the original succession plan. The owner and the successor lack the competencies to help realign the enterprise. With identified root causes and a multi-phased approach laid out, the owner has chosen to move forward as suggested.

The excitement is palpable, and many are thrilled at the thought of flourishing through this process in lieu of the alternatives. The sound guidance of third-party certified professionals who specialize in their fields will allow day-to-day tasks to continue while growth and development occur in the background. At the same time, small modifications will begin to enhance organizational culture so a mindset shift can occur across the enterprise. Industry and institutional knowledge are invaluable, and with guided professionals coming alongside leadership, the enterprise will persevere. With the same diligence, grit, and determination on which the owner built this enterprise, the employees will flourish and enhance the organization in a way that makes it the most sought-after subcontractor in the industry for generations to come.

About the Author

Brandi Humphries has worked in human resources for more than 20 years. She is a Senior Certified Professional through the Society for Human Resource Management. Dr. Humphries has a passion for serving those she encounters through empowering

conversations that inspire servanthood through developing others. She continues to serve in the construction industry, focusing on cross-cultural leadership and supporting field craftsmen and administrative staff. Dr. Humphries received her Master of Business Administration and her Doctor of Strategic Leadership.

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Honoring Goals and Dreams: A Holistic Approach to Academic Success, Coaching, and Advising

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Abstract

In the current context of higher education, a holistic approach to support and development can also go beyond the conventional academic framework. This paper highlights the need for a strong partnership between success coaching and advising by calling for a more holistic approach that encompasses students' academic, psychological, social, and physical aspects. It is possible to do this while looking beyond the classroom, as it will help institutions create a culture that changes students' mindsets, beliefs, and personal concepts of success. Applying a holistic approach enables institutions to acknowledge each student's unique goals and dreams and the role of institutional collaboration in their achievement. Through observed case studies, this integrated approach reviews how it can change the students' perception, which should encourage the stakeholders to shift to a structured, student-focused approach for the benefit of each student—serving as a call to action for stakeholders to adopt an intentional, student-centered model that allows every student to reach their fullest potential and flourish.

Keywords: academic coaching, student retention, higher education, academic flourishing, partnership, case management, student support, transformational advising

Introduction

Research on academic coaching's impact highlights the growing need for best practices that boost engagement and retention for both traditional and nontraditional students, whether online or on campus—encouraging Christ-centered higher education institutions to adopt proactive, coaching-based advising. Conventional measures of success often focus solely on academic achievement (Steinmayr et al., 2014), overlooking

essential aspects of student well-being. As students' needs evolve (Tinto, 2012; Zhao, 2024), so should institutional strategies to support them, with faculty and staff taking on shared accountability for students' goals.

Today's students face diverse challenges, being first-generation students, managing perfectionism, family expectations, time, anxiety, stress (Zhao, 2024), mental health (Patel & Lewis, 2023), and individual learning styles (Pashler et al., 2009); and navigating an unpredictable job market (Boulton et al., 2019). Poor academic performance is a symptom of something deeper that requires a complex solution focusing on the student's academic and non-academic needs, going beyond the academic environment (Alzen et al., 2021). In this regard, a close association between advising and coaching helps the student to be more involved, remain in the institution, and be more determined (Singhani et al., nd).

Institutions embracing a comprehensive approach where students feel heard and valued create a supportive climate for thriving (Carlson, 2020). This article advocates a student-centered strategy emphasizing attentive listening, customized goal setting, and institutional commitment. Academic advising guides students through academic pathways (Assiri et al., 2020; Burton & Wellington, 1998), while coaching addresses individual challenges and goals (Howlett et al., 2021), forming a proactive, high-touch support network.

The following sections contain specific recommendations for the integrated approach supported by the Bible and studies with different outcomes to show how it can be improved. Given the retention, graduation rates, and student satisfaction, this study highlights the need for a drastic change in how students are handled in the current system to develop a more holistic and student-focused approach to thrive.

Foundations of Student Engagement and Well-Being

Understanding students' academic and personal needs is the first step to creating a holistic support model, which begins with understanding what students need to do academically and personally. Student engagement is increasingly recognized as a vital indicator of institutional success and quality, affecting learning, development, and retention (Laranjeira & Teixeira, 2024). Engagement is the student's involvement in academic activities and how organizations can engage resources to facilitate the students' experiences (Wenger et al., 2024). Family influence, campus culture, and faculty support are some factors that affect students' engagement levels, hence underlining the need for a strong supportive system.

According to the studies, higher engagement is linked with better well-being, thus creating (Boulton et al., 2019). cycle, where students are fluid and do dynamic well, which in turn influences their academics by having students' better communication well-being (Boulton with their academic and social context). Addressing underperformance begins with enhancing conditions that foster student engagement.

Evolving Academic Coaching and Advising

Institutions must integrate academic and personal support into a well-oiled machine, efficient, timely, and tailored process to make a sustainable and transformative change. A mission-centered, student-centered approach supports students' success and perpetuates the gains made. Clough (2016) suggests that academic coaching is a proactive, student-centered approach to fostering meaningful, lasting change. However, students often need help to ask for help, especially those who feel overwhelmed or uncertain about their capabilities. Alzen et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of a strong student–advisor relationship to support academic and personal goals.

The O'Banion (1972) advising model challenges traditional, transactional advising by emphasizing life goals, vocational goals, program choices, and other personal elements. This model has evolved to accommodate today's diverse student body, which includes more adult learners, first-generation students, and individuals facing financial or family responsibilities (Burton & Wellington, 1998). Modern advising has evolved from the provision of generalized advice to provide students with tailored information and support to make the advisor the heart of student retention and success. Thus, the concept of advising as a process that encompasses both the functional, which involves transactional activities, and the developmental, which involves transformational activities, can help students find their way in their academic and career journeys.

Transformational advising goes beyond administrative tasks, fostering student innovation and leadership (Nandedkar et al., 2020).

Enrollment in higher education is expected to rise, but graduation rates only sometimes keep pace, often due to under-preparedness (Tinto, 2012). Advisors can use a case management model to ask probing questions that reveal students' concerns while building trust and enabling growth (Larson et al., 2018).

Studies have proven coaching to impact retention significantly. Coached students are more likely to demonstrate resilience, persist, and succeed long-term (Bettinger & Baker, 2011, 2014). This highlights the need for an interventive approach to supporting students from their first year to graduation. Practitioners Bettinger and Baker (2011) conducted a study using data from InsideTrack, a coaching firm that provides student

coaching at various public, private, and proprietary colleges. The company's model focuses on partnering with universities to deliver its mentoring program. In institutions, InsideTrack included all the students who met the criteria and then assigned these students to two equal parts of the population. Then, the respective institution decided which of the two groups would be supported. These pseudo-groups enable them to compare the students who got the coaching with those who did not get any coaching and thus enable the formation of a robust estimate of the effects of the services. The outcomes determined that the coached group's retention and completion rates were more significant. These results remained consistent for every length of time following enrollment. After 6 months, students in the coached group were 5.2% more likely to persist than those in the noncoached group. Moreover, these students experienced a meaningful, lasting impact of coaching and endured for at least one more year after coaching had concluded.

Biblical Perspective for Holistic Student Care and Coaching

Although the Bible does not state any explicit guidelines for educators, it offers some general guidelines that are compatible with the role of students. In the same way that the Bible teaches us to serve others with love, support the growth of others, and teach others the word of God (Prov. 4:7; Gal. 5:13), Clough (2016) states that coaching is a process which is initiated by the student, facilitated by the coach and supplemented by the Holy Spirit which ensures that there is trust between the two. This foundation aligns with an integrated approach through which faculty and staff can accompany the students in their spiritual, academic, and social lives.

Tailoring Support for Individual Student Needs

In higher education, support must be adaptable to students' varied backgrounds, goals, and challenges. Data-driven insights allow institutions to identify and assist struggling students early. Holistic coaching addresses academic, personal, and career aspirations, while flexible, culturally responsive services accommodate diverse student needs, including first-generation and minority students. Wellness initiatives and career guidance integrated with advising help students maintain resilience and achieve their aspirations.

Evaluating the Impact of Academic Success Coaching: Case Studies in Student Resilience and Accountability

In 2022, the Student Achievement Partner program was launched as a pilot to support at-risk students. Approximately 18 students participated, including athletes and those readmitted after academic dismissal. The following case studies reviewed the efficacy of

mandatory coaching, the role of family support, and mindset coaching in developing concepts of resilience, accountability, and sustainability.

Table 1: Case Study for Student A

Variable	Data
Background	20-year-old female, a sophomore pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in English
Challenges	Significant academic challenges early in her college career, leading to academic suspension
	Their initial GPA was 0.00, reflecting substantial academic struggles
Support and strategies implemented.	Various personal and academic difficulties
	Health and emotional challenges
	History of academic setbacks, including fulfilling an incomplete grade from a previous semester. These challenges compounded her lack of motivation, and she frequently felt unheard and unsupported in her academic environment.
Outcomes and results	Established a structured weekly schedule by previewing upcoming assignments and dedicating specific time blocks to study; she enhanced her focus and reduce academic stress.
	Developed time-chunking techniques to manage tasks effectively, maintaining momentum even when motivation waned
	Parental involvement also played a critical role in her success. Regular, open communication with her mother provided emotional and motivational support, bolstering her commitment to her academic goals.
Outcomes and results	The combined effects of structured scheduling, time chunking, and strengthened family support improved Student A’s academic performance. Her GPA increased from 0.00 to 2.78, and she returned to good academic standing.
	Implemented strategies empowered her to build resilience and self-advocacy skills, helping her address the personal and academic challenges that had previously impeded her progress.
	Student A’s case demonstrates the impact of personalized academic coaching and structured support strategies on student success, particularly for students facing complex challenges.

Variable	Data
	Student A overcame her initial academic setbacks by consistently planning, fostering communication, and building family support, creating a foundation for future academic and personal growth.

Table 2: Case Study for Student B

Variable	Data
Background	<p>41-year-old male undergraduate senior pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Management Information Systems</p> <p>Navy veteran</p> <p>12 years of experience in IT</p> <p>Works as a civilian systems engineer for the Navy</p> <p>First-generation college student</p> <p>Multiple personal and academic challenges that impacted his progress, leading to academic probation and academic dismissal</p> <p>At the program's start, his GPA was 1.91; despite interventions, it dropped to 1.81 by the end.</p>
Challenges	<p>He encountered significant personal obstacles, including financial strain due to a recent divorce, the responsibility of being the sole caregiver for his mother, and mental health struggles related to major depressive disorder and anxiety.</p> <p>Faced with the recent loss of a family pet</p> <p>Navigating the complexities of a new relationship</p> <p>Self-identified as a “people pleaser”</p> <p>Student B frequently took on more than he could manage, leading to feeling overwhelmed and unable to complete tasks under stress.</p> <p>Struggled with core curriculum elements such as reading comprehension, interpretation, exam preparation, and effective notetaking</p>
Support and Strategies Implemented	<p>The academic support team provided several resources to assist Student B.</p> <p>Some of the measures that were put in place include individualized study plans developed to meet the student's needs and SMART goals,</p>

Variable	Data
Outcomes and Analysis	<p>which were used to define tasks into smaller steps. To avoid problems with time management and to reduce the interference of environmental factors, efforts were made to foster the accountability and task prioritization mindset.</p> <p>Since the student tended to get overwhelmed easily, Student B was also advised on the importance of mental health and the need to take breaks and practice self-care.</p> <p>Despite all the efforts to develop individual study plans and set SMART goals to improve the student's focus, he needed help to sustain applying these strategies, leading to his academic dismissal.</p> <p>He also stated that more than his approach of task scheduling based on due dates and the time it would take to complete the tasks was needed to handle the load of academics and other activities in his life.</p> <p>The combination of his personal and academic problems affected his ability to stay focused and accountable, leading to his academic dismissal.</p> <p>This case shows that even though mindset coaching plays a role in enhancing accountability, student engagement is a key factor in academic success. Resources and support can assist students, but the students themselves have to be ready to embrace the opportunities that are offered and be accountable for their own learning.</p> <p>This is the case of Student B, which depicts the various issues that nontraditional students go through in their personal and academic lives.</p>

For at-risk students, success depends on the presence of resources and the development of a growth mindset and active engagement. Accountability is a crucial aspect as well. Although it is important to note that support systems and coaching provide the framework, the student must accept the help and put into practice the action plans that have been developed for his or her success. These case studies show how a comprehensive, individualized coaching model can help students become agents of change in their lives, academically and personally. By fostering resilience, accountability, and a proactive mindset, we equip students to overcome challenges and thrive.

Conclusion

For higher education to stay at the forefront of improvement and innovation, it must be student-focused. Utilizing data from online educational platforms and gathering student input can increase persistence and retention. Professional development and cross-functional teamwork equip faculty and staff to lead modernization and pilot projects, such as the Student Achievement Partner, that start small and will allow them to experiment before global scaling. Adopting emerging technologies, examining curricula frequently, and comparing notes keep institutions on par with current industry standards and advancing student needs. Setting up structures cycled with foundational coaching principles encourages process-oriented continuous review and an open culture that values innovation and fosters deliberate risk and flexibility. All these strategies create an environment that is dynamic enough to respond to the needs of students as they evolve.

About the Author

Dr. Shoneen N. Brown is experienced in leadership coaching, training, and development. She believes establishing a coaching culture in organizations decreases self-limiting thoughts and beliefs while increasing self-awareness, conflict management and resolution, work performance, relationships, and effective communication. In 2015, Dr. Brown joined Enrollment Management at Regent University, where she served in various leadership roles throughout her career. She now serves as the Sr. Associate Director of Student Support, overseeing programs, initiatives, and coaching services designed to assist students academically, emotionally, and socially, fostering student success and well-being.

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Creating Space for Human Flourishing: Partnering with the Metaverse in Coaching

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Belem Leaders

Roundtable: Professional Coaching

Abstract

Professional coaching involves developing various skills that, when consistently strengthened over time, enhance effectiveness and impact the coach-client partnership. In an era where artificial intelligence and the metaverse are developing at record speeds, integrating technologies into coaching practices is complex, bringing unique challenges for practitioners working to maintain integrity. As the coaching profession explores tech-driven environments, Christian and secular coaches seek to understand opportunities, limitations, and ethical considerations. With new ways of operating using digital platforms, metaverse practitioners must elevate their learning and development and coaching presence to design a psychologically safe client experience. Colossians 3:23 (*New International Version Bible, 1978/1990*), provides guidance in “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters.” This presentation paper will examine how practitioners can partner with man-made technologies to create human flourishing through coaching opportunities delivered with excellence.

Keywords: Christian coaching, metaverse, artificial intelligence, integrity, transformation, psychological safety, technology, presence, flourishing

Introduction

The coaching industry is marked by transformative conversations that, when done right and well, significantly impact individuals, teams, and organizations. Over the years, professional coaching has evolved into a billion-dollar industry. While the dollar signs demonstrate the money spent, the ways of delivering coaching have changed dramatically. Historically, coaching was conducted face to face, but in recent years, a shift towards digital modalities has evolved. Due to a pandemic, practitioners experienced a decline in traditional face-to-face engagements. According to Passmore et

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al. (2024), fewer than 30% of coaches were meeting in person with clients. Telephonic coaching decreased by 21%, and as our world continued to experience change, it became advantageous to utilize digital platforms like Zoom and Microsoft Teams for coaching sessions. These platforms experienced a substantial increase with 43.85% of coaching conversations being completed in a quasi-face-to-face environment. This digital modality became the go-to for coaches and clients alike (43.85%).

With computer innovations, the way humans interact has been transformed (Yasuda, 2024). With the availability, affordability, and ease of using digital modalities realized, meeting with clients via technology-based platforms made way for fewer travel requirements, allowing engagements to take place across the globe with a click of a button. What was once regarded as the future of coaching has now become our present reality. This shift highlights the necessity for practitioners to refine their skills, embrace innovative coaching environments, and engage in discussions with clients about meeting preferences and requirements. Each modality of coaching has benefits and drawbacks. What remains the same is the need for professional coaches to not only develop competencies that demonstrate their abilities but also be committed to delivering them with integrity.

Adopting a Metaverse Mindset

Practitioners have a responsibility to be open to and cultivate a continuous mindset of openness to new learning and integrity as they discover ways to work in the metaverse. There is a different feel for the coach, a different feel for the client. Because of the newness of this technology for practitioners, they may be learning with their clients, together in a new world of being. As practitioners engage, they must accept the fact that our world is rapidly changing, and because of this, navigating unfamiliar territory can be uncomfortable.

Embracing a future-oriented and client-centered mindset, coaches must cultivate the skills necessary for their ongoing professional growth, particularly in an industry where unqualified individuals often present themselves as coaches. Obtaining certification, which requires specific and ongoing training, helps differentiate coaches on paper. However, having a certification is only as good as the coach can partner with their clients to bring about flourishing. Working in the digital space challenges practitioners in areas of learning and development, coaching presence, and designing environments that promote psychological safety, and integrity.

Coaching competencies and calls for ethical guidance have evolved, though slowly, in response to emerging needs. It is essential for coaches to continually learn and adapt so they can serve their clients well. With continued advancements in technology, the metaverse has become a social platform where artificial intelligence technologies have

created an immersive experience that, while not perfect, is intuitive. This new way of operating in the coaching world calls for practitioners to increase their adaptability, mindset, skill set, and ethical considerations. For the Christian practitioner, being mindful of the guidance in Colossians 3:23, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters,” (*New International Version Bible*, 1978/1990) should be front of mind as we engage with His people.

Defining the Metaverse

The word “metaverse” conjures up different feelings, mindsets, and scenarios. For most practitioners, like artificial intelligence, metaverse is a new word that comes with many unknowns. Metaverse is a term for three-dimensional worlds; technology that enables multi-sensory interaction between the physical and digital worlds (Yasuda, 2024; Ritterbusch & Teichmann, 2023). Like the word “coaching” and the word “leadership,” there is not a uniform, scientific, one-sentence definition of metaverse. The definition continues to change and evolve as it is perceived, depending on the stakeholder and their lens.

The word “metaverse” was first introduced in 1992 in a science fiction book called *Snow Crash* by Neal Stephenson (Ng, 2022, Ritterbusch & Teichmann, 2023; Yasuda, 2024). In his book, Stephenson proposes that the metaverse is an evolution of the internet, built on virtual reality and inhabited by avatars controlled by users. Moreover, Ng (2022) cites Dionisio et al. (2013) who conceptualize the prefix, “meta” to mean beyond and “verse” is suggested to mean universe. More recent definitions and conceptualizations have evolved to include:

- “a network of 3-D virtual worlds where people can interact, do business, and forge social connections through their virtual avatars” (Jin, 2024, as cited in Purdy, 2022) and
- “an augmented digital world that is blending physical and virtual spaces through the use of extended reality (XR) and artificial intelligence-based systems for uses to interact, and/or trade virtual goods or services through cryptocurrencies” (Cho et al., 2023).

Stephenson’s book did not gain much notoriety when published, but in recent years has increased interest as the popularity of the metaverse has been established. In 2003, one of the first metaverse avatar platforms was created by Linden Lab founder, Philip Rosedale, and it was called *Second Life* (Ritterbusch & Teichmann, 2023). Ten years later, this 3-D platform boasted 36 million user accounts and one million monthly users from around the world (Linden Lab, 2013). *Second Life* failed to deliver on the anticipated breakthrough due to technical limitations and the size of the platform’s audience, which they call residents. There were also issues with the lack of advancement in virtual

reality glasses. However, 20 years later, Second Life continues to suggest they “provide a safe space for its residents to express their authentic selves” (Linden Lab, 2023).

In 2021, Facebook’s Mark Zuckerberg shared the vision of the metaverse. He unveiled Facebook’s rebranded and reimagined way of who and what they are as a company to advance how people experience the world (Meta, 2021). Meta, as a company, was born. The Meta newsroom shares:

Meta builds technologies that help people connect, find communities, and grow businesses. When Facebook launched in 2004, it changed the way people connect. Apps like Messenger, Instagram and WhatsApp further empowered billions around the world. Now, Meta is moving beyond 2D screens toward immersive experiences like augmented and virtual reality to help build the next evolution in social technology. (What is Meta? section)

Christian Perspectives

Coaching is about creating a sacred space where transformation can take root with flourishing and impact as the outcomes. In the metaverse, this is still true. There is much to deliberate at the intersection of biblical principles and the moral and ethical considerations of the metaverse. When in a coaching session, whether it is by telephone, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or another chosen platform, practitioners must consider the client first and foremost. As a Christian practitioner, biblical principles will always serve as the foundation of coaching inside or outside of the metaverse. Scripture teaches us the value of love, integrity, and accountability. These are all aspects that are carried into coaching engagements.

Increasingly, as we forge into the metaverse, coaches must create opportunities to explore, learn, and share their experiences. Proverbs 27:17 teaches that “as iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another” (*New International Version Bible*, 1978/1990). This is important in the coaching relationship but also equally important in the coach-to-coach relationship, as new awareness and skill sets are learned and practiced. Practitioners should ponder the following:

- What new experiences can I share and with whom?
- What new coaching competencies are being developed in the metaverse?
- What does a digital practitioner and the client relationship look or feel like?
- What challenges am I experiencing and how are challenges overcome?

Mark 10:45 teaches, “for even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve” (*New International Version Bible*, 1978/1990). As coaches, we should adopt this mindset. We must look to prioritize the needs of the client and foster a supportive, safe environment that empowers them to grow and flourish regardless of the coaching

environment or platform we use. Adoption of working in the metaverse must include an action plan of assessing the readiness and comfort level of your client prior to entering an alternate world. This approach builds trust and encourages openness, which is essential in the metaverse where all senses are on high alert. Showing up for our clients in our humanness with the Holy Spirit as our guide is a powerful combination to bring into the coaching engagement to be in service of our clients.

Ethical Considerations

There are ethical considerations for practitioners to contemplate when delivering coaching in the metaverse. During a panel discussion on Artificial Intelligence (AI) at the 2023 Professional Coaching Roundtable, I brought forward the *Belem Leaders Guiding Principles for Practitioners: AI Commitments and Best Practices* (Belem Leaders, 2023). These principles were developed and released on October 17, 2023, in conjunction with Dr. Diane Wiater of Wiater Consulting Group, after realizing there was no guidance for the use of AI from a Christian perspective. Areas of concern during the development phase were addressing the challenges practitioners were experiencing to include ethical impact which 35% of the respondents from 19 countries relayed as the number one area to be impacted by AI in the Belem Leaders 2023 research on *The Future of Coaching and Consulting Survey*. The anonymity and virtual nature of the metaverse must foster a safe space for all users. Each area of the Belem commitments consists of what we believe, biblical inspiration as guiding scripture, and a practitioner commitment. This first attempt at creating guidance has proven to be a much-needed advancement in the conversations around ethical practice and the use of technology that include the following six pillars:

1. God as Creator
2. Honor & Care for Others
3. Co-Creating through Collaboration and Partnerships
4. Intentional, Continuous Learning
5. Permissions, Privacy, Transparency, and Informed Consent
6. Research and Thought Leadership

Christian practitioners must ensure that their practices align with Christian values, promoting in all things the character of Christ. The six pillars of *Guiding Principles for Practitioners: AI Commitments and Best Practices* give all people, regardless of role, the understanding of how to align Christian faith with using AI which also translates to the metaverse. There are tremendous issues with data privacy, consent, and the potential for harmful behaviors. Having guardrails in place to help practitioners uphold ethical standards, reflect the Christian faith, and enhance the credibility and effectiveness of professional practices becomes a win-win for both client and coach.

Unique Opportunities for Practitioners

There may be challenges for practitioners when deliberating the use of the metaverse as a coaching platform, however, there are also opportunities to consider. These new opportunities are exciting because they enhance development. Developing as a practitioner with a focus on both skill enhancement and business growth offers a unique environment for a coaching practice. Practitioners who have the desire to increase their skills can meet in the metaverse to experiment with coaching techniques, engage in role-play, and receive real-time feedback from peers and clients. This immersive experience can enhance coaching and communication skills, increase adaptability, and increase emotional intelligence as senses become heightened.

Coaches can take part in online workshops and certification courses that are designed specifically for the metaverse and virtual coaching. Having a continuous learning mindset will help early adopters and the curious keep current on industry trends, but also enrich their technology tool kit. Adding the metaverse to your toolkit and bringing best practices into engagements allows practitioners to serve their clients with excellence as they continue to practice. As the metaverse continues to pique the interest of academics and practitioners, resources and training programs will continue to develop and gain strength. With added learning comes opportunities to grow as a coach and as a leader in the technology space.

The metaverse also presents opportunities for coaches to expand their reach by establishing a virtual presence. We can connect with clients within the metaverse just like we do on Zoom or Teams regardless of geographic location. The opportunity to break down barriers that might exist in traditional coaching settings is no more if there is an internet connection to enter the space together. According to Jin (2024), an important principle when creating a humane metaverse is for it to be inclusive and equitable. However, because of the lack of internet connection and skills that are needed, inequities still exist. To counter this, there are metaverse devices that do not need an internet connection, and with time, any skills needed can be learned.

Providing space to coach, connect, and pique the curiosity of new or existing clients in the metaverse allows practitioners to create unique offerings, differentiating their services in a competitive market. The metaverse is an excellent way to capture a segment of the population who loves gaming – people who are already comfortable in the virtual reality space. Do you know younger people who do not want to step into coaching even if coaching is offered in the workplace? These potential clients may find coaching intriguing if their engagements are delivered in the metaverse. They already have experience with virtual reality; bringing them into coaching via the metaverse could increase the practitioner's client base and create impact for the client. Professional coaches who choose to coach in the virtual space create an environment for their clients

to flourish. With practice, coaches can intentionally create psychological safety, establish trusting relationships, and demonstrate heightened awareness and presence necessary in the metaverse.

Concluding Thoughts

As we work on behalf of the Lord, we leave an open door for our clients to experience our Christian faith, even if the client does not practice the same faith. A Christian coach may not always serve fellow Christians as clients. Still, I challenge my fellow practitioners to show up fully as a Christian coach. By grounding our work in biblical principles, embracing the character of Christ, and being vigilant about moral and ethical considerations, practitioners can gain ground as they navigate the complexities of the metaverse. Even in this complex environment, we can still create a positive experience, an opportunity for flourishing, and create impact in and for our clients. There is still work to do in creating a metaverse that is everything practitioners may want this space to be. There are still glitches and areas within the technology that might not work smoothly. There are still questions that will emerge as coaches step into new ways of operating. Although the metaverse is still a little bit clunky at times, it is fun to play in and allow clients the opportunity to engage. Are you ready to deliver coaching in an alternate world?

About the Author

Dr. Kelly M. G. Whelan is a globally recognized executive and team development strategist and founder of Belem LLC (Belem Leaders). Dr. Whelan is a 2017 DSL graduate of Regent University and an adjunct in the doctoral coaching concentration. She is certified as a Gallup® Strengths Coach and, with a passion for working with teams, holds a European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) ITCA- Sr. Practitioner Level team coaching accreditation. In keeping with bringing a Christian voice to the world, Dr. Whelan became editor-in-chief of *Christian Coaching Magazine* following a July 2022 acquisition by Belem LLC.

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Feedback: Fueling Leadership Development for Human Flourishing and Honor

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Abstract

Professional coaching is well suited to address, display, and yield human flourishing. Since introducing the Golden Trifecta of Leadership Development in 2022 (Wiater, 2022), advancing the understanding and application of the model has been paramount. Feedback is essential for leader growth in all three relationships of the model. Feedback done right and well can not only lead to flourishing but is a demonstration of partnerships of honor. Applying feedback is what gives it power. Trust and psychological safety are core to creating relationships of honor. High-impact leaders tend to receive less and lower-quality feedback. When the leader is honored, they can flourish, and when the leader flourishes, there is a pathway for followers and the organization to flourish as well.

Keywords: feedback, leader, flourish, honor, partnership, Christian, coach

Introduction

The 2024 Professional Coaching Call for Abstracts was a challenge for Christian practitioners to present best practices from their experiences in a faith context and connect them to coaching and human flourishing. The theme of the Professional Coaching Roundtables is *Partnerships of Honor* under the School of Business and Leadership (SBL) theme of *Human Flourishing – Its Role in Business and Leadership*. The call noted professional coaching is well suited to address, display, and yield human flourishing.

Since introducing the Golden Trifecta of Leadership Development in 2022 (Wiater, 2022), advancing the understanding and application of the model has been paramount. The premise of this model is that for true leadership development to take place, the three elements of training, mentoring, and coaching have to be in place and operating in

the context of the leader's experience. Practically, in my roles as a coach trainer, coach, and professor, it has become clear the context of experience has little or no power for the individual in growth and development without the relational aspect of feedback. Feedback is essential for leader growth in all three relationships of the model. The essentiality of feedback led to calling it the fuel for the Golden Trifecta of Leadership Development. Without feedback, growth is non-existent or stunted. Feedback when given in and through honoring partnerships leads to flourishing leaders.

Baylor University's Global Flourishing Study (GFS) (n.d.) was, in part, an inspiration for the theme of the SBL 2024 Annual Research Roundtables. "The Global Flourishing Study is grounded in a broadly inclusive understanding of what it means to flourish: *living in a state in which all aspects of a person's life are good*" (Flourishing Defined section). The study defines flourishing and is measuring six domains broadly shared across 20 countries and cultures. This 5-year, groundbreaking study has more than 200,000 participants and 40 researchers. While this study contributes to the research prompt, I will present an extended understanding of flourishing.

What does this mean to those of us who are leadership development practitioners? Broadly, I am addressing all leadership development practitioners, specifically those who are Christ followers, and still more focused, those who are Christian coaches.

While the Golden Trifecta of Leadership Development includes training, mentoring, and coaching, this article specifically puts attention on the coach-client partnership. This article presents feedback as fuel for leadership development. Beyond that, it presents the power of partnerships of honor in providing a safe place for leaders to position themselves to receive feedback. Demonstrating further, feedback done right and well can not only lead to flourishing but is also a demonstration of partnerships of honor.

Definition of Coaching

As with academic definitions, nailing down an agreed-upon definition of "coaching" is difficult. Those who receive coaching attest it works! Coaching done well has impact. In the 2022 SBL Regent University Annual Research Roundtables, I presented the definition of coaching as "an agreed-upon client-centered and client-driven partnering relationship, skill set and process honoring the client which leads to transformation for the clients" (Wiater, 2022). It is a bit clunky as I read it now. In this definition, "partnership," "client-centered," "client-driven," "agreed upon," and "honoring" were keywords and concepts I deemed necessary for inclusion. The definition is evolving as my research and understanding of coaching advances. As a side note and in anticipation, I expect, following the 2024 Roundtables, I will continue to draw from and collaborate with Christian coach colleagues in developing a new or revised definition.

Feedback is essential in leadership development. It is not surprising that as we read about valuable feedback, we see the construct of trust. Trust is necessary for feedback to be credible and received.

Trust and Safety

Trust and psychological safety are core to creating relationships of honor. Trust positively contributes to leadership development (Al Shamsi et al.). European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) Sr. level practitioner team coach Dr. Kelly Whelan (2022) notes that “trust is the expectation that an individual can be counted on to do what they say they will do in a future moment. Trust happens in personal and professional relationships and is given to an individual but is also diminished or lost” (p. 7). Whelan continues, “when people experience psychological safety, they feel safe, valued, welcomed, encouraged, appreciated, and acknowledged ... share openly thoughts, feelings, ideas without the fear of retaliation” (p. 8). In guiding individuals into creating a Kingdom Culture of Honor, Dr. Dana Cavallaro (2015), instructor at Regent University’s School of Divinity writes,

When people feel honored and safe, they no longer have to wear a mask to cover their shame. They can be transparent, honest about their flaws, and authentic. In this culture of honor, healthy shame serves as a reminder of sin, not to condemn, but to emphasize the wonder of grace and inclusion into God’s family. (p. 270)

Cavallaro (2015) and Whelan (2022) mark true honor as taking place through one’s relationship with God first. In a chapter on coaching, leadership, and follower development, I (Wiater, 2023) note, “Trust is so centric to coaching that in my conversations with peers, many professional coaches think you cannot have a coaching relationship without it. Trust begets trust and strengthens the coaching relationship” (p. 114). As Christian coaches and leaders, our first responsibility in creating trust, psychological safety, cultures of honor, and partnerships of honor is our identity in Christ and being vessels of honor humbled and obedient to our Lord.

Feedback and Reference Points

In my 2024 Professional Coaching Roundtables presentation (Wiater, 2024), I note that indicator lights are valuable features on everyday equipment, giving us quick visual status as points of reference. They function to comfort, warn, or notify us and, in some way, build awareness. I ask, “What if we had indicator lights or instruments for our leadership development status?” My response is a proclamation. We do! Those indicators are feedback. To press this point further, without implementation and accountability, the feedback is void and can spoil.

In my leader development, I recall a supervisor guiding me through receiving feedback I was resistant to. He asked me what I was going to do with that feedback, I did not know. He instructed me to pause and ask myself if it was true. It was. I did not say so out loud. I did not like that it was true and did not like that someone had given me the feedback. His next question to me was, "What are you going to do with it?" Notice, he did not ask if it was true or if it was not true. The question was powerful. As was his practice, he seized the teachable moment and expertly instructed me.

Key points:

- Feedback can reduce anxiety and increase the likelihood an employee will meet and exceed performance targets. (Groover, 2006)
- Feedback can establish expectations and standards of performance (Groover, 2006)
- Subordinates are developed through feedback (Al Shamsi et al., (2015)
- The feedback process has a positive impact on employee satisfaction
- Feedback is a method of correcting course (Roberts, 2024)
- Feedback positively impacts predictability (Al Shamsi et al., (2015)
- Feedback impacts leader perceptions (Maxwell, 2005)
- Feedback can change and impact outcomes (Maxwell, 2005)

Two global EMCC leadership coaches, Samantha Amit and Dr. Kelly Whelan, collaborated on a podcast to share techniques for leaders giving and receiving feedback. Their conversation dove into intentionality, mindset, and psychological safety. Creating a safe space for feedback goes beyond the old sandwich model where the negative or difficult-to-hear information is sandwiched between two positive pieces of information to make it more palatable for the receiver. Amit (2024), while guiding leaders in the audience, stated,

The environment that you're going to create, and that's not just from a psychological safety environment, but the actual physical environment that you're going to be in ... we typically don't want to have these conversations, especially if they are uncomfortable at the water cooler in the hallway with everybody standing around, so setting the stage is important when we are talking about feedback. (24:38)

During the podcast (Amit, 2024), Amit encouraged listeners by noting, you cannot just leave someone with feedback, they might need nurturing. Below is a summary of Amit and Whelan's key points.

- We need to recognize that feedback may not be delivered perfectly
- Give yourself and the other person grace

- Sit with the uncomfortable information; you do not have to do something immediately
- Remember that it is not about you as a person
- Feedback is one of the best ways to develop yourself and your team
- Stretch yourself past your comfort

There is limited guidance regarding how the leader ought to position themselves to receive feedback. In an article by Sutherland et al. (2024), we learn highly effective leaders often receive less valuable developmental feedback from supervisors, peers, or direct reports. The feedback they do receive tends to focus more on fostering self-awareness and self-improvement rather than being performance-driven. High-impact leaders typically get less and lower-quality feedback compared to their moderate or low-impact counterparts (Sutherland et al., 2024). We learned that rater training is crucial for meaningful assessments, as untrained feedback may lack value. Additionally, multi-rater assessments have limitations, making proper rater preparation essential (Sutherland et al., 2024).

Some of the above points are common for those who manage or work with people. Not common is the practical knowledge for leader development that we need to apply and use as the fuel of feedback. Applying feedback ignites and gives it power. Leadership coaches partner with leaders in applying feedback.

Developing relationships and positioning ourselves to give and receive feedback is catalytic to leadership development. Trust and credibility create safety for leaders to give, receive, and apply feedback. Applied feedback is catalytic to growth in our leader development.

Is the leader's position for receiving feedback different than any other? No. For the Christian leader, the position is the same. The Apostle Paul reminds us,

For by the grace given me, I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you (*New International Version Bible*, 1978/2011, Rom. 12:3)

Building relationships and positioning ourselves to both give and receive feedback are essential catalysts for leadership development. When effectively applied, feedback becomes a powerful driver of growth in our leadership journey.

We learned rater training is crucial for meaningful assessments, as untrained feedback may lack value. Additionally, multi-rater assessments have limitations, making proper rater preparation essential (Allen et al., 2011).

Flourishing

The 2024 Professional Coaching Call for Abstracts, noted that of all professions, coaching is the one helping people flourish. In coaching language, we use phrases and terms like “helping clients become their best selves” “becoming their best self” “reaching their potential,” “attaining dreams,” and “living fully.” We are still trying to express clear definitions of Christian coaching, and many professionals have poured time, thinking power, prayer, and conversations into expressing what coaching is and does. In the profession, there has been an awakening regarding what coaching can do for the client.

The term, “potential,” presents the assumption of an expected end for someone, the impression of potential as something to be attained. This suggests a finite, predetermined, explainable outcome. Can we, as Christian coaches know what reaching potential really is for someone? In coaching the focus is on the client’s outcomes, goals, and desires, which guide the coach-client partnership. The coach brings their heart to the client and professional competencies to support the client. In a study by Steffens et al. (2018), leaders who were told they had low potential to become leaders lost interest and were less committed to their development as leaders.

Flourishing immediately evokes images of overflowing abundance, uncontainable beauty, lush, healthy, thriving, foliage and fruit. Boundlessness! Webster (1828), paraphrased, expressed the words “flourish” and “flourishing” as a sense of hope, openness, expanding, thriving, to grow luxuriantly, prosperous, and increase wealth. What if we, as Christian coaches, are partners with God (the Holy Spirit) in helping our clients flourish? Many Christian coaches have the expectation and practice of partnering with God to help the client become their best self. In a recent article for Christian coach practitioners, Perera (2024) notes, “Christian coaching-client partnerships founded and rooted in the Trinity will produce lasting results” (“What Christian coaching circles” section).

I will take this further and say, when I see something flourishing, I see beauty, I am filled with joy and hope. Consider the impact Christian coaching could have on human flourishing. The Apostle Paul, in his prayer for the Ephesian church, declares this,

Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, ²¹ to Him *be* the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations ^[n]forever and ever. Amen. (*New American Standard Bible*, 1960/1995, Eph. 3:20–21)

When this prayer is fulfilled, we have no idea what an individual flourishing is becoming!

In another prayer of the Apostle Paul, he says,

I thank my God, every time I remember you, in all my prayers for you I pray with joy, for your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this very thing, that He who began the good work in you will carry it to completion, until the day of Christ our Lord. (*New International Version Bible*, 1978/2011, Phil. 1:3-6)

The word translated as “completion” is in the continual present and means it is always happening. It did not get completed. It is completing.

The Holy Spirit convicts, comforts, guides and leads us. The Holy Spirit exists to bring glory to God. When believers cooperate with the Holy Spirit and allow the gifts of the Spirit to flow through them, they live compelling lives. Flourishing is out of bounds, overflowing lush, rich beauty!

Leader Position in Receiving Feedback

Let’s circle back to an early question in the article, What is the position the leader should have when receiving feedback? Leader or follower, the position for receiving feedback is the same and is characterized by humility. Leaders should ask for feedback.

Partnership of Honor

Christian leaders have both the responsibility and privilege of co-creating a safe space—psychologically and physically—for offering and receiving feedback. By fostering a partnership rooted in honor, leaders bring their authentic selves to the relationship. Each partner is accountable for demonstrating the character of Christ, avoiding condemnation, and recognizing and honoring one another’s identity as uniquely created in the image of God. Partners serve as humble vessels before the Lord. Trust, humility, and the shared identity in Christ, along with mutual recognition of this identity, are hallmarks of partnerships built on honor. When the leader is honored, they can flourish, and when the leader flourishes, there is a pathway for followers and the organization to flourish, as well.

About the Author

Dr. Diane Wiater serves as the chair of the 2024 SBL Professional Coaching Roundtable. With more than 25 years of experience in training and teaching coaches, she is a coach’s coach and leader in developing Christian coaches. Dr. Wiater is a certified Gallup® Strengths Coach and is certified to administer the MBTI. As founder and CEO of Wiater Consulting Group, LLC, Dr. Wiater is a trusted strategic partner, profitable business manager, and effective leader developer. Her passion is seeing leaders grow, thrive,

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Systemic Futures: Leveraging Strategic Foresight for Holistic Human Flourishing in Christian Leadership

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Roundtable: Strategic Foresight

Abstract

This article investigates the application of strategic foresight methodologies by Christian leaders to promote comprehensive human flourishing across personal, communal, and societal dimensions. By integrating a systems approach with foresight tools such as environmental scanning, scenario planning, and backcasting, leaders can better anticipate changes, reframe perspectives, and uncover innovations necessary for realizing a biblical vision of flourishing. The study includes case studies that demonstrate Christian organizations' successful use of strategic foresight. The findings emphasize the critical role of foresight in equipping today's "chiefs of Issachar" to discern future trajectories and develop strategies aligned with divine purposes.

Keywords: strategic foresight, human flourishing, Christian leadership, scenario planning, backcasting, environmental scanning, futures thinking

Introduction

The world is changing rapidly due to forces like globalization, technology, and urbanization. Merely seeking incremental improvements will be insufficient for Christian leaders seeking to promote holistic human flourishing – the fulfillment of God's purposes for personal, communal, and societal well-being across spiritual, relational, physical, and vocational dimensions. Strategic foresight empowers leaders to explore plausible futures, identify emerging issues, and develop strategies aligned with a biblical vision of flourishing for all. As Richard Slaughter (1997) defines it: "Strategic foresight is the ability to create and maintain a high-quality, coherent and functional forward view, and to use the insights arising in organizationally useful ways" (p. 14). By fusing future methods with strategic practices, foresight allows organizations to stand in the future and look back at the present, rather than just extrapolating the past (van der Laan, 2021).

Why Foresight for Christian Leaders?

The biblical vision aligns with promoting holistic shalom (peace) and flourishing. However, the rapidly changing landscape creates new challenges and opportunities for realizing this vision that require discernment. Strategic foresight can help Christian leaders

- anticipate change that impacts human flourishing across dimensions,
- reveal innovative approaches to emerging issues, and
- stress-test strategies against potential disruptions.

As the biblical “chiefs of Issachar understood the times and knew what Israel should do” (*New King James Bible*, 1979/1982, 1 Chron.12:32), foresight equips today’s leaders to discern the trajectories shaping the future and chart a wise course aligned with God’s purposes.

Foresight Tools and Methodologies

Key foresight practices to advance a vision of human flourishing include:

- **Environmental scanning:** Systematically monitoring trends, events, and weak signals across areas like technology, economics, politics, values, and demographics (STEEP+V analysis) (Puatany, 2023).
- **Scenario planning:** Developing multiple plausible scenarios about how the future could unfold based on key drivers of change. This surfaces new perspectives and implications (Ringland, 2014).
- **Backcasting:** Defining a desirable future vision first, then working backwards to identify policies and actions needed to realize that vision (Brewer, 1976).
- **Visioning:** A process where stakeholders co-create shared positive images of the future to guide strategy and planning (Clampett, 2022).
- **Strategic conversations:** Using foresight findings to foster critical debates that challenge assumptions and reframe strategic issues (Thanager & Co, 2023).

The Foresight Process

Figure 1: A Typical Strategic Foresight Process Flow



Note: Based on insights from Bengston (2013).

The strategic foresight process begins by framing the issue around human flourishing. This is followed by an environmental scan to identify trends, signals, and drivers. Multiple scenarios are then developed to imagine how the future could unfold. A visioning phase co-creates a preferred future state. Finally, the insights are translated into strategies and plans.

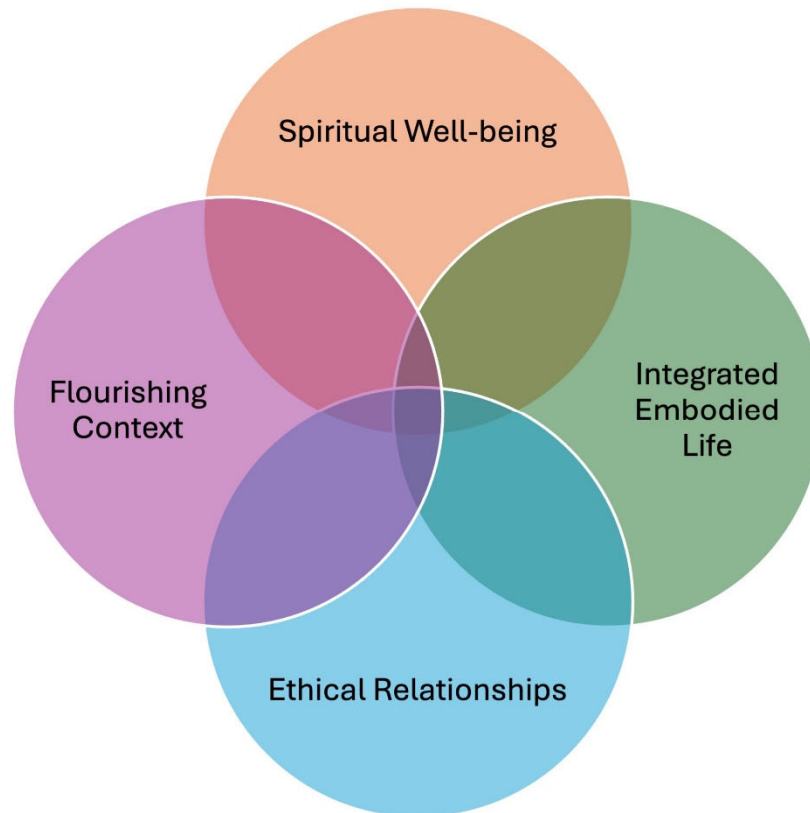
Applying Foresight for Human Flourishing

One perspective views human flourishing as embodying four interrelated dimensions:

- **Relationship with God:** spiritual well-being and experiencing divine love
- **Relationships with others:** ethical treatment, social belonging, cultural expression
- **Integrated embodied life:** physical, mental, and emotional health; living one's calling
- **Particular context:** flourishing within one's circumstances and place

By examining how emerging trends could impact these dimensions, leaders can develop strategies and innovations that holistically promote flourishing.

Figure 2: The Four Dimensions of Human Flourishing



Note: Based on insights from Mueller (2022).

A holistic view of human flourishing encompasses spiritual well-being, ethical treatment of others, integrated personal health and calling, and flourishing within one's particular life circumstances. For example, scenario planning could explore how trends like rising loneliness, ecological damage, or workforce automation may affect human relationships, health, and vocational callings in the future. Backcasting from a vision of flourishing communities could reveal policies, partnerships, or technologies needed to get there (Brewer, 1976).

Case Study: A Christian University

Grand Canyon University has adopted a "Christ-centered vision for human flourishing" across intellectual, moral, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. They state, "As creatures made in the image of God, flourishing in the most profound sense entails communion with God the Father through faith in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy

Spirit” (Mueller, 2022, p. 1). The university sees its role as intentionally contributing to the common good and human flourishing by helping students cultivate their gifts and discover creation’s potential in ways that honor God (Mueller, 2022).

Foresight in Practice

One Christian leadership organization illustrates how to begin using foresight through guided discussions:

- What emerging trends, issues, and choices do we see in our environment?
- How might these combine to change our future environment?
- To what new horizon is God calling us?
- Is our organization prepared for the future 5, 10, 20 years out? (Maramara, 2023)

By exploring such questions, Christian leaders can uncover potential futures and develop strategies to leverage emerging opportunities to advance a biblical vision of human flourishing.

Key Takeaways and Calls to Action

- **Adopt strategic foresight practices:** Christian leaders and organizations should adopt strategic foresight practices like environmental scanning, scenario planning, and backcasting to anticipate changes, reframe perspectives, and uncover innovations for human flourishing (Thanager & Co, 2023).
- **Foster strategic conversations:** Leverage foresight findings to foster critical strategic conversations that challenge assumptions, reframe issues through a flourishing lens, and co-create shared positive visions (Maramara, 2023).
- **Equip today’s chiefs of Issachar:** As Christian leaders discerning “the times,” leverage foresight to develop wise strategies aligned with God’s purposes for holistic personal, communal and societal well-being (Livingston, 2024).

Conclusion

The rapidly changing landscape presents challenges but also opportunities for realizing God’s vision of human flourishing across personal, communal and societal dimensions. Strategic foresight equips Christian leaders to anticipate changes impacting flourishing, reframe perspectives, and develop adaptive, innovative strategies grounded in a richer understanding of the future.

By leveraging methodologies like environmental scanning, scenario planning and backcasting, leaders can illuminate the pathways and innovations needed to holistically promote spiritual, relational, physical, and vocational well-being (Livingston, 2024). In doing so, they can continue the legacy of the chiefs of Issachar who discerned the times

and knew what to do. Strategic foresight empowers Christian leaders to be better prepared as ministers of healing, guiding communities towards the flourishing that God intends (Puatany, 2023).

About the Author

Dr. Rodney B. Woods, a certified executive coach and a 2021 strategic foresight doctoral graduate of Regent University, is a prominent figure in leadership and strategy. Currently serving as the vice president and chief clinical engineer at BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee, Dr. Woods has significantly impacted organizations through his multifaceted expertise and extensive knowledge in strategic foresight, leadership development, strategic planning, innovation strategies, organizational culture, and the dynamics of social change.

As a dynamic conference speaker and author, Dr. Woods's academic excellence, practical experience, and engaging presentations make him a sought-after authority in strategic foresight, leadership, and innovation. He inspires and equips individuals and organizations to excel in today's dynamic world. His forthcoming book, *Envision: Leading and Thriving in Disruption*, promises to be a valuable resource for leaders seeking to survive and thrive in a rapidly changing environment.

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Trauma-Informed Leadership: Integrating Research-Based Leadership Theories and SAMHSA Principles for Building Resilient Teams

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Abstract

Trauma-informed leadership is an emerging framework that integrates an understanding of trauma and its impacts with leadership practices that foster resilience, empowerment, and emotional healing. Trauma-informed leaders prioritize the needs of their followers by practicing behaviors and embodying attributes that promote well-being and resilience. This article examines trauma-informed leadership through the lens of established leadership theories, including transformational, servant, adaptive, and authentic leadership. It highlights its alignment with the trauma-informed care principles developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. The four core attributes of trauma-informed leadership – authenticity, emotional intelligence, relational capacity, and resilience – are discussed in detail, providing leaders with a framework for creating supportive and healing environments. Additionally, the four behaviors of trauma-informed leaders – understanding trauma, regulating distress, empowering others, and providing emotional healing – offer practical strategies for navigating the complexities of trauma in the workplace. Together, these insights provide a comprehensive guide for leaders seeking to implement trauma-informed principles in their organizations.

Keywords: trauma, trauma-informed leadership, leadership model, resilience, trauma-informed care principles, leadership development

Introduction

The modern workplace is becoming more aware of the impact of trauma on employees and leaders alike, leading to the rise of trauma-informed leadership as a relevant and necessary framework for organizational success. Trauma-informed leaders prioritize the needs of their followers by practicing behaviors and embodying attributes that promote well-being and resilience. By understanding trauma and its long-lasting

effects, trauma-informed leaders are equipped to foster environments where individuals feel supported and able to thrive. This leadership framework is grounded in the work of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA; 2014), whose trauma-informed care principles provide an essential guide for implementing trauma-informed practices.

As organizations face unprecedented challenges due to global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, economic uncertainties, and social unrest, leaders are tasked with navigating these disruptions while ensuring the well-being of their teams. This article explores trauma-informed leadership through the lens of established leadership theories and SAMHSA's trauma-informed care principles. It discusses the four attributes and behaviors of trauma-informed leadership in depth, offering leaders practical strategies for building resilient and high-performing teams.

Defining Trauma and its Impact

Trauma is defined as a deeply distressing or disturbing experience that overwhelms an individual's ability to cope, resulting in long-term psychological, emotional, and physiological effects. Trauma can be caused by various events, such as violence, natural disasters, war, or abuse, and it is not limited to specific demographics or circumstances. According to SAMHSA (2014), trauma is a widespread public health issue that affects individuals of all ages, genders, and backgrounds. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* classifies trauma-related disorders, such as posttraumatic stress disorder, as significant mental health conditions that can disrupt an individual's everyday functioning (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

The Neurological Impact of Trauma

The impact of trauma on the brain is profound, altering critical brain structures involved in emotional regulation, memory, and executive functioning. The amygdala, responsible for processing emotions and detecting threats, becomes hyperactive in individuals who have experienced trauma. This heightened state of arousal, known as hyperarousal, can lead to exaggerated emotional responses, making individuals more prone to fear, anxiety, and irritability (Van der Kolk, 2015). Trauma survivors may find themselves in a constant state of alertness, perceiving ordinary situations as threats due to the amygdala's overactivation. This response is often observed in workplace settings, where trauma survivors may struggle to manage stress and maintain focus.

Trauma can damage the hippocampus, which plays a crucial role in memory formation and recall. Prolonged exposure to stress hormones like cortisol can shrink the hippocampus, resulting in memory fragmentation and difficulty distinguishing between past and present experiences (McEwen, 2007). Trauma survivors may have disjointed or incomplete memories of traumatic events, leading to confusion and

emotional distress. This may manifest as forgetfulness, disorganization, or difficulty processing new information in a work environment.

Trauma also affects the prefrontal cortex (PFC), which is responsible for higher order cognitive functions such as decision making, problem solving, and impulse control. Trauma weakens the PFC's ability to regulate emotions and respond rationally under stress. Individuals may struggle with concentration, decision making, and emotional regulation, leading to impulsive behaviors or difficulty maintaining composure during stressful situations (Arnsten, 2009). In the workplace, this can result in inconsistent performance, difficulty managing tasks, and challenges adapting to changes.

Trauma's impact extends beyond the brain to the body, as the brain-body connection links psychological trauma to somatic symptoms. Trauma survivors often experience chronic pain, fatigue, digestive issues, and other physical symptoms related to prolonged activation of the autonomic nervous system (Porges, 2011). This connection between mental and physical health underscores the importance of trauma-informed leadership, as leaders need to recognize the somatic manifestations of trauma and provide appropriate support to affected individuals (Kessler, 2018).

However, one of the most hopeful aspects of trauma recovery is neuroplasticity, the brain's ability to adapt and form new neural connections. Individuals can recover cognitive and emotional functioning over time through therapeutic interventions, mindfulness practices, and supportive environments (Doidge, 2007). Trauma-informed leaders are critical in fostering environments that support neuroplasticity by promoting emotional regulation, psychological safety, and continuous learning.

Understanding the neurological effects of trauma helps trauma-informed leaders recognize behaviors that may be rooted in trauma, such as hypervigilance, memory challenges, and emotional dysregulation. By creating environments that support emotional healing and resilience, trauma-informed leaders can mitigate the long-term effects of trauma and help individuals thrive both personally and professionally.

Defining Trauma-Informed Leadership

Trauma-informed leadership integrates the principles of trauma-informed care into leadership practices. Trauma-informed leaders prioritize their followers' needs by practicing behaviors and embodying attributes that promote well-being and resilience. They emphasize the importance of creating environments where individuals can feel safe physically, psychologically, socially, morally, and culturally and where they can develop resilience in the face of adversity (Lloyd, 2024).

The foundation of trauma-informed leadership is grounded in empirical research and the trauma-informed care principles established by SAMHSA (2014), which include the following:

- **safety:** ensuring that individuals feel physically and psychologically safe.
- **trustworthiness and transparency:** building and maintaining trust through transparent actions.
- **peer support:** encouraging connection and shared experiences among individuals.
- **collaboration and mutuality:** promoting teamwork and shared decision making.
- **empowerment, voice, and choice:** recognizing and fostering individuals' autonomy and ability to make informed decisions.
- **cultural, historical, and gender issues:** acknowledging the impact of identity and history on individuals' experiences of trauma.

Trauma-informed leadership aligns with these principles by prioritizing relational safety, emotional regulation, and empowerment. Leaders adopting this model aim to foster environments where trauma survivors can feel seen, heard, and respected, contributing to individual growth and organizational success.

Cross-Reference With Research-Based Leadership Theories

Trauma-informed leadership intersects with several established leadership theories, offering a holistic approach that blends emotional intelligence (EQ), servant leadership, transformational leadership, adaptive leadership, and authentic leadership. Each leadership model contributes unique insights that complement and enhance the trauma-informed leadership approach, particularly in fostering environments where individuals can thrive despite experiencing adversity.

Servant Leadership

Robert Greenleaf (1977) introduced the concept of servant leadership, which emphasizes the leader's role in serving the needs of others. Servant leadership aligns closely with trauma-informed leadership in its focus on empathy, emotional healing, and putting the well-being of followers at the forefront. Both models recognize that effective leadership involves creating environments where individuals feel supported, valued, and empowered. Trauma-informed leadership, however, expands on servant leadership by addressing the specific needs of trauma survivors, offering strategies to

promote emotional healing and foster a culture of resilience. By prioritizing the emotional and psychological safety of team members, trauma-informed leaders serve as facilitators of growth and recovery.

Transformational Leadership

As Bass (1985) described, transformational leadership emphasizes inspiring and motivating followers to achieve higher levels of performance. This leadership style involves creating a vision, fostering innovation, and encouraging personal development. Trauma-informed leadership shares common ground with transformational leadership, focusing on inspiring growth and change. However, trauma-informed leadership adds an additional layer of support by ensuring that leaders consider their team members' emotional and psychological well-being (Seligman, 2011). While transformational leaders push for high performance, trauma-informed leaders balance this ambition with empathy, understanding the need to regulate distress and create a safe space for individuals who may be navigating the long-term effects of trauma.

Adaptive Leadership

Adaptive leadership, as described by Heifetz and Linsky (2002), focuses on the ability of leaders to navigate change and uncertainty by mobilizing individuals to face complex challenges and adapt to new circumstances. Adaptive leadership is particularly relevant in trauma-informed leadership because it emphasizes the leader's capacity to respond flexibly to complex and unpredictable situations. Trauma-informed leaders, like adaptive leaders, understand that trauma can manifest in unexpected ways and that rigid leadership approaches may not be effective in addressing the emotional and psychological needs of individuals who have experienced trauma. Both leadership styles emphasize the importance of learning, growth, and resilience, particularly in adversity. Adaptive leaders empower their teams to develop new strategies and coping mechanisms in response to changing environments, aligning with the trauma-informed leadership behavior of empowering others to take ownership of their recovery and growth.

Authentic Leadership

Authentic leadership, developed by Avolio and Gardner (2005), focuses on self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and moral integrity as core components of effective leadership. Authentic leaders are genuine, self-aware, and true to their values, creating trust and fostering open communication within their teams. Trauma-informed leadership closely aligns with authentic leadership, particularly its emphasis on relational capacity and authenticity. Trauma-informed leaders must be authentic in their interactions, as building trust is essential for creating environments where trauma survivors feel safe and supported. Both leadership models recognize that

authenticity fosters psychological safety, which is critical for individuals who may be coping with the effects of trauma. By being transparent and genuine, trauma-informed leaders model vulnerability and openness, encouraging their team members to express their emotions and needs without fear of judgment or reprisal.

Integrating Leadership Theories Into Trauma-Informed Leadership

These leadership theories – EQ, servant leadership, transformational leadership, adaptive leadership, and authentic leadership – provide valuable insights that enhance the trauma-informed leadership framework. EQ contributes to the development of empathy and self-awareness, both essential for understanding and responding to trauma in the workplace. Servant leadership emphasizes the leader’s role in fostering emotional healing and prioritizing the well-being of others, while transformational leadership focuses on inspiring growth and resilience. Adaptive leadership highlights the importance of flexibility and innovation in response to the challenges posed by trauma, and authentic leadership underscores the value of trust and relational transparency in creating psychologically safe environments.

By integrating these leadership theories, trauma-informed leadership offers a comprehensive approach to addressing the emotional and psychological needs of individuals in the workplace. Trauma-informed leaders not only drive performance and growth but also ensure that their teams feel safe, supported, and empowered to navigate the complexities of trauma. The combination of these research-based leadership theories creates a leadership model that is both compassionate and effective, fostering resilience, trust, and long-term organizational success.

The Four Attributes of Trauma-Informed Leadership

Trauma-informed leadership is distinguished by four core attributes that guide leaders in fostering resilient, supportive, and safe environments for individuals who have experienced trauma. These attributes are authenticity, EQ, relational capacity, and resilience. Each attribute reflects a leader’s ability to understand trauma’s emotional and psychological complexities while promoting an organizational culture that prioritizes safety, trust, and empowerment (Spencer, 2019). Understanding these attributes allows leaders to create spaces where individuals can feel supported, heard, and empowered to grow despite the challenges they may face due to their trauma experiences.

Authenticity. Authenticity is central to trauma-informed leadership because it fosters an environment of trust and psychological safety, which are crucial for trauma survivors. Authentic leaders are genuine in their interactions, transparent about their values, and consistent in their behavior. This attribute is essential because trauma

survivors often have heightened sensitivity to inconsistency or perceived dishonesty, which can trigger feelings of mistrust or fear (Brown, 2018).

Authentic leaders demonstrate vulnerability by openly acknowledging their challenges and limitations and encouraging others to do the same. By being transparent and truthful, these leaders create a culture of openness where team members feel comfortable sharing their emotions and concerns without fear of judgment or reprisal. This is especially important in trauma-informed environments, where psychological safety is paramount. Leaders who model authenticity help normalize emotional expression and foster a sense of belonging, which is critical for trauma survivors to feel supported.

Authenticity also helps build deeper connections between leaders and their teams. Trauma survivors may struggle with trust, often because of previous negative experiences with authority figures or organizations. When leaders demonstrate authenticity by aligning their actions with their words and showing genuine concern for their team's well-being, they break down barriers to trust and create a more inclusive, empathetic workplace (Gentry et al., 2020).

Emotional Intelligence (EQ). EQ is the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's emotions while being attuned to the emotions of others. It is a critical component of trauma-informed leadership, as it allows leaders to navigate the emotional complexities that arise when working with individuals who have experienced trauma. Leaders with high EQ are better equipped to create environments where team members feel emotionally safe and understood. The three most important aspects of EQ for trauma-informed leaders are self-awareness, empathy, and self-awareness.

Self-Awareness. Self-awareness involves recognizing one's emotional responses, particularly in high-stress situations, and understanding how these emotions might affect others. For trauma-informed leaders, self-awareness is critical to avoiding reactive behaviors that could unintentionally retraumatize employees. By being mindful of their own emotional state, leaders can model calmness and composure, which helps regulate the team's emotional climate (Goleman, 1998).

Empathy. Empathy, on the other hand, is the ability to understand and share the feelings of others. Trauma-informed leaders must practice empathy to connect with their team members on a deeper level, especially when addressing the effects of trauma. Unlike sympathy, which often involves feeling pity for others, empathy requires leaders to step into their employees' emotional world, offering support grounded in understanding rather than judgment. Leaders who show empathy validate the experiences of trauma survivors, making them feel seen, heard, and valued. This

validation is crucial in helping individuals regain a sense of agency and control over their work and personal lives (Lloyd, 2024).

Self-Regulation. Beyond self-awareness and empathy, trauma-informed leaders with high EQ are also skilled in self-regulation, which allows them to manage their emotional responses in stressful situations. This is critical for preventing conflicts from escalating or triggering traumatic memories in others. Through EQ, leaders can create emotionally safe spaces where individuals feel supported and capable of contributing to their fullest potential.

Relational Capacity. Relational capacity refers to a leader's ability to build, maintain, and strengthen relationships. It is a foundational aspect of trauma-informed leadership. Trauma often damages an individual's ability to trust and connect with others, making relational capacity essential for leaders who are tasked with fostering team cohesion and psychological safety. Trauma-informed leaders must prioritize relationships and recognize the importance of emotional bonds within their teams.

Leaders with strong relational capacity are adept at creating an inclusive environment where individuals feel a sense of belonging. They are intentional about fostering connection, offering support, and building trust. This is especially important for trauma survivors, who may struggle with feelings of isolation or alienation because of their experiences. Leaders with high relational capacity actively listen to their team members, practice patience, and are responsive to their emotional and psychological needs.

Furthermore, relational capacity involves understanding the nuances of interpersonal dynamics and navigating complex relationships in the workplace. Due to past experiences, trauma survivors may have difficulty forming new relationships or maintaining healthy ones, so leaders must be sensitive to these challenges and work to cultivate positive, supportive interactions. By prioritizing relationships and fostering a collaborative environment, trauma-informed leaders can help their team members rebuild trust and form meaningful connections, essential for emotional healing and professional growth (Brown, 2018).

Resilience. Resilience is the ability to adapt and thrive in the face of adversity, and it is a cornerstone of trauma-informed leadership. For leaders, resilience means maintaining composure and stability in challenging situations and helping their team members build resilience by creating environments that promote growth, learning, and recovery. Trauma-informed leaders recognize that trauma can have a lasting impact on an individual's ability to cope with stress, and they are committed to fostering resilience within their teams.

Flexibility and Adaptability. A trauma-informed leader's resilience is rooted in flexibility and adaptability. They remain calm and composed during crises,

demonstrating confidence in guiding their team through difficult times. This stability is crucial for trauma survivors, who may feel overwhelmed by change or uncertainty. By modeling resilience, leaders provide their team members with safety and assurance that challenges can be overcome (Luthans et al., 2007).

Growth Mindset. Additionally, trauma-informed leaders recognize that resilience is not a fixed trait but a skill that can be developed over time. This belief is supported by research on neuroplasticity, which shows that the brain can form new pathways and recover from trauma through deliberate practice and learning (Doidge, 2007). Trauma-informed leaders encourage their teams to adopt a growth mindset, which involves viewing challenges as opportunities for learning and development rather than insurmountable obstacles. By promoting a growth mindset, leaders help their team members build resilience and increase their capacity to navigate future adversities.

Well-Being. Resilient leaders also invest in their teams' well-being by promoting self-care, providing access to mental health resources, and encouraging practices that support emotional and physical recovery. They understand resilience is not simply about bouncing back from hardship but building the internal and external resources necessary for long-term recovery and success. By fostering a resilient team, trauma-informed leaders ensure that their organizations can weather crises while maintaining high levels of performance and well-being.

The Four Behaviors of Trauma-Informed Leadership

In addition to the four core attributes, trauma-informed leadership is distinguished by four key behaviors that allow leaders to create psychologically safe, empowering, and supportive environments for individuals who have experienced trauma. These behaviors include understanding trauma, regulating distress, empowering others, and providing emotional healing. Each behavior builds on the trauma-informed leadership framework, offering practical strategies for leaders to navigate complex emotional landscapes, reduce the risk of retraumatization, and foster team resilience.

Understanding Trauma. The first and most foundational behavior of trauma-informed leadership is understanding trauma and its far-reaching effects. Leaders must recognize that trauma is not a one-time event but a long-lasting emotional and psychological response that can affect an individual's ability to function in personal and professional settings. Trauma manifests differently for each person, depending on factors such as the nature of the trauma, the individual's support system, and their coping mechanisms. Understanding trauma requires leaders to be knowledgeable about its symptoms, such as hypervigilance, anxiety, emotional numbing, and difficulty concentrating (Van der Kolk, 2015).

Trauma-informed leaders go beyond surface-level knowledge by familiarizing themselves with the neuroscience of trauma, including how traumatic experiences can alter brain structures such as the amygdala, hippocampus, and PFC. This understanding helps leaders recognize that certain behaviors – such as heightened emotional responses, memory issues, or difficulty making decisions – may be trauma related rather than signs of incompetence or disengagement. For example, an employee who struggles to meet deadlines or maintain focus might be coping with the long-term effects of trauma. Rather than reprimanding the individual, trauma-informed leaders approach them with empathy and provide support, such as adjusting workloads, offering flexible deadlines, or suggesting mental health resources.

Additionally, understanding trauma involves recognizing that trauma can stem from various sources, including personal experiences (e.g., domestic violence, sexual assault) or collective events (e.g., natural disasters, war, or pandemics). Leaders must be sensitive to individual and collective trauma and how these experiences impact their teams. This holistic understanding allows trauma-informed leaders to create a supportive environment where individuals feel seen, heard, and valued.

Regulating Distress. A critical behavior of trauma-informed leadership is the ability to regulate distress within the organization. Trauma survivors often experience heightened sensitivity to stress, and workplaces can inadvertently become environments that trigger distress if not managed carefully. Trauma-informed leaders understand that promoting safety – physical, psychological, social, moral, and cultural – is essential for mitigating the negative impacts of stress and creating a conducive work environment. Regulating distress requires leaders to foster safety in five key areas.

Physical Safety. Leaders must ensure the workplace is free from physical threats or harm, creating an environment where employees feel safe from accidents, injuries, or violence. Trauma survivors, especially those with histories of physical or emotional abuse, need reassurance that their physical well-being is prioritized.

Psychological Safety. Psychological safety is an environment where employees feel safe expressing themselves without fear of judgment, retaliation, or humiliation (Edmondson, 1999). Trauma-informed leaders promote openness, encourage emotional expression, and validate employees' feelings, ensuring individuals can share their experiences without fear of negative repercussions.

Social Safety. Social safety fosters an inclusive and supportive community where employees feel a sense of belonging (Huerta et al., 2020). Trauma survivors often struggle with isolation or distrust, making it crucial for leaders to promote positive social interactions and ensure that team dynamics are respectful and collaborative.

Moral Safety. Moral safety is the alignment between an individual's values and the organization's actions and principles (Bloom, 2017). Trauma survivors, particularly those who have experienced betrayal or moral injury (such as soldiers in combat), may be sensitive to ethical violations or injustice in the workplace (Shay, 2014). Leaders must ensure that organizational practices are transparent, fair, and aligned with the organization's stated values.

Cultural Safety. Cultural safety involves recognizing and respecting individuals' diverse backgrounds, including their cultural, racial, and gender identities (SafeWork NSW, n.d.). Trauma survivors may feel vulnerable or marginalized due to their experiences, and trauma-informed leaders ensure that the workplace is culturally competent, offering support and validation to individuals from all backgrounds (Williams, 2019).

By addressing these five types of safety, trauma-informed leaders create a stable and predictable environment where individuals can regulate their emotions, manage stress, and perform effectively. For instance, a trauma-informed leader might implement flexible working hours or provide quiet spaces for employees to decompress when they feel overwhelmed. These strategies ensure that distress is mitigated and employees are equipped with the resources they need to thrive in the workplace.

Empowering Others. Empowerment is a core behavior of trauma-informed leadership. It involves recognizing each individual's intrinsic value and providing opportunities for growth, autonomy, and self-determination. Trauma can leave individuals feeling powerless or helpless, so leaders must foster an environment where individuals are encouraged to take ownership of their work and feel confident in their decision-making abilities.

Empowering others requires leaders to actively involve their team members in decision-making processes, giving them a voice in shaping their roles and contributions. This is especially important for trauma survivors, who may feel disempowered or disconnected from their sense of agency. Trauma-informed leaders recognize the importance of providing choice and control, allowing individuals to set goals, make decisions, and contribute to the organization in ways that align with their strengths and interests (SAMHSA, 2014).

One powerful metaphor for empowerment in trauma-informed leadership is the Japanese art of kintsugi, where broken pottery is repaired with gold, emphasizing the beauty in imperfection and recovery (Princer, 2022). Trauma survivors, like kintsugi pottery, are often shaped by their experiences, but these experiences do not diminish their value. Instead, they can be seen as sources of strength, resilience, and wisdom.

Trauma-informed leaders understand this and provide opportunities for individuals to rebuild their sense of self-worth through meaningful contributions to the organization.

Leaders can empower their team members by offering mentorship, professional development opportunities, and leadership roles that allow them to grow and develop. Trauma-informed leaders foster a sense of autonomy and trust to help individuals reclaim their power and build the confidence necessary to succeed in their personal and professional lives.

Practicing Emotional Healing. Practicing emotional healing is a central behavior of trauma-informed leadership, rooted in the principles of servant leadership, where leaders prioritize the well-being of their team members. Trauma survivors often carry deep emotional wounds that affect their performance and relationships within the workplace. Trauma-informed leaders recognize the importance of fostering environments where healing can occur, and they actively engage in practices that promote emotional well-being, resilience, and recovery.

Rather than attempting to “fix” individuals or offer superficial solutions, trauma-informed leaders practice emotional healing by creating a space where team members feel safe expressing their emotions, receiving validation, and engaging in their healing journeys. This process is built on empathy, active listening, and a commitment to supporting the emotional needs of their followers.

Two examples of emotional healing in leadership – one from President George W. Bush and another from former President Donald Trump – illustrate how trauma-informed leaders can practice emotional healing during crises.

Following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, President Bush provided a clear example of practicing emotional healing (Shogan, 2011). His speeches and public appearances were filled with empathy and unity, acknowledging the collective grief experienced by the nation. When Bush addressed first responders at Ground Zero, his message of resilience, solidarity, and resolve helped create a space for emotional healing among Americans. His ability to express empathy and foster national unity contributed to collective recovery during overwhelming trauma.

During his 2024 presidential campaign, former President Trump faced an assassination attempt in Butler, Pennsylvania (Holmes, 2024). In response, Trump practiced emotional healing by acknowledging the gravity of the situation and expressing gratitude for his safety, law enforcement, and the continued support of his followers in the immediate aftermath of the situation. His focus on resilience and appreciation fostered a sense of unity and strength among his supporters, offering emotional reassurance in the face of danger. While Trump’s leadership style is often assertive and

direct, this moment showed his capacity to promote emotional healing through gratitude and resilience.

These examples highlight how trauma-informed leaders practice emotional healing by fostering environments of empathy, emotional support, and validation. This practice involves more than responding to individual needs – it requires leaders to cultivate an organizational culture where emotional well-being is prioritized. Trauma-informed leaders can promote emotional healing by facilitating access to mental health services, advocating for work-life balance, and creating an atmosphere where open communication is encouraged.

Conclusion

Trauma-informed leadership is a critical framework for navigating the complexities of trauma in today's organizations, where leaders must recognize and respond to the profound impacts trauma has on individuals and teams. This leadership approach integrates an understanding of trauma with the practical behaviors and attributes necessary to foster resilience, empowerment, and emotional healing. Trauma-informed leaders prioritize the needs of their followers by practicing behaviors that promote well-being and embodying attributes that build resilience. This framework is rooted in the understanding that trauma affects individuals' emotional, cognitive, and physiological functioning, often disrupting their ability to perform and thrive in the workplace.

By synthesizing established leadership theories – transformational, servant, adaptive, and authentic – trauma-informed leadership offers a comprehensive model that integrates safety, trust, and empowerment. The four key attributes of trauma-informed leadership – authenticity, EQ, relational capacity, and resilience – create a foundation for leaders to build supportive and healing environments. Furthermore, the four core behaviors – understanding trauma, regulating distress, empowering others, and practicing emotional healing – provide practical strategies for mitigating trauma's effects while fostering growth and recovery.

In particular, the focus on regulating distress through the five types of safety (physical, psychological, social, moral, and cultural) ensures that leaders create environments where individuals can manage stress, feel secure, and engage fully. The ability to practice emotional healing, as demonstrated by leadership examples from President George W. Bush and former President Donald Trump, highlights the importance of empathy, resilience, and validation during times of crisis. Trauma-informed leadership requires an ongoing commitment to these principles, fostering a workplace culture where employees are empowered, supported, and able to recover from adversity.

As organizations continue to face global challenges and uncertainties, the principles of trauma-informed leadership offer a pathway to effectively responding to trauma and

building resilient and thriving teams. Leaders who prioritize trauma-informed practices will mitigate the negative impacts of trauma and unlock the potential for growth, innovation, and lasting success within their organizations.

Author's Note

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Human Flourishing: The Acts of Selfless Love

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Roundtable: Servant Leadership

Abstract

Servant leadership is letting go of *self* and focusing on the needs of others. Evaluating the benefits of human flourishing and reaching beyond ourselves allows us to serve others better, find purpose in our calling, and serve those who need it most. This paper tells the story of serving those evacuees from the Ruidoso Fire on June 17, 2024. It also examines the song and movie “I Can Only Imagine” about a man’s hate towards his father and then, as his father grew closer to Jesus, his father became his best friend before passing. This paper discusses different types of human flourishing while involving intercultural communication and servant leadership. The focused areas are self-pleasing and self-gratification, a resting place, bringing hope through serving, a safe place, achieving goals and teachable moments, and the importance of effective communication.

Keywords: Mathew 5-6, intercultural communication, human flourishing, fire evacuees

Introduction

Human flourishing? What is human flourishing? I have pondered this myself for many days, hours, and minutes as I began to write this article. I have interviewed many individuals from age 17 to 70. When asked what the meaning of human flourishing is, the following were some of the answers:

- Self-fulfillment.
- Successful and thriving in their careers.
- Finding peace in their environments.
- Creating a safe place for individuals to cope.
- Humans doing well in a specific environment.

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- Knowing, living, and sharing the love of God.
- Someone who is positively growing in their life and being fruitful.
- Living life to the fullest! A life that is filled with abundant joy and making many happy memories with people you love the most! Having peace that surpasses all understanding! This comes only from having a relationship with Jesus!
- Being successful? A person flourishing in life.
- Understanding your purpose, has healthy relationships, knows how to communicate their needs, and has a good sense of self-worth. When you have these things, it leads to other success as well.
- A person who is becoming who God has made them to be.
- Human flourishing is self-sacrificing and helping others reach their full potential as an individual, creating a safe place for growth, and overcoming hurdles, so you can reach your full potential by being the leader God has chosen you to be. Creating a safe place of boundaries, helping others before you help yourself.
- Letting go of preconceived notions of what you or others think your life should look like. Finding contentment in what it looks like right at the moment. After doing this, then you can find space to flourish. Otherwise, you are always seeking and never truly happy.
- Humans progressing or improving.
- A person who is happy and possibly healthy and fit.
- Happy with life, content with circumstances, and being willing to grow.

As you can see, people have different answers about what human flourishing is. Human flourishing is being content with your circumstances and being willing to find joy during the trial. Learning to find joy amidst the pain and finding laughter during the hard times represents a time of growth and contentment. There are circumstances we cannot control; we can decide to be Debbie Downers or Rayes of Sunshine.

Psalms 16:11 (*New King James Version [NKJV]*, 1996) reads, “You show me the path of life, In your presences there is fullness of Joy; At your right hand are pleasure for evermore.” The term *human flourishing* has only developed over the past two decades. The traditional translations come from the Greek word *eudaimonia*, which refers to happiness. *Eudaimonia* was meant to be objective, not subjective (Rasmussen, 1999, p. 2) Rasmussen (1999) wrote, “Human flourishing is that-for-the-sake-of-which human conduct is done, and though flourishing is dependent on human agency for its achievement, it does not depend on such agency for its status as the ultimate end” (p. 3) Human flourishing is a way of living. It is a way to express oneself. Some would say human flourishing is being successful, whereas some might say it is helping others find a safe place to grow and reach their full potential. Some might envision human flourishing as a lush green garden bubbling up with life and springs of water. The truth

is human flourishing is what you make it. It is truly what you perceive with your own eyes.

In *Servantology: The Periodic Elements of Servant Leadership*, Christopher P. Meade (2023) created a periodic table for servant leadership using the periodic table of elements as a format. This creative idea really resonates with the servant leader. Though an entire article could be written on his book, I am only highlighting the 22 elements he created.

1. Accountability (AC) Calcium

2. Awareness (AW) Silver

3. Character (CH) Iron

4. Community (CO) Sodium

5. Compassion (CM) Nickel

6. Developer (DV) Nitrogen

7. Empathy (EQ) Boron

8. Forward Thinking (FT) Silicon

9. Grit (GT) Tungsten

10. Growth (GR) Diamond

11. Guts (GU) Titanium

12. Humility (HU) Argon

13. Inclusivity (IC) Lithium

14. Influence (IN) Carbon

15. Listening (LI) Oxygen

16. Others-Centered (OT) Helium

17. Service (SV) Platinum

18. Sponsor (SP) Hydrogen

19. Transformation (TN) Uranium

20. Trust (TR) Gold

21. Truth Telling (TT) Neon

22. Vulnerability (VN) Mercury

Each element is a character of servant leadership. These elements represent a piece of servant leadership. Servant leadership is built up of different attributes and characteristics within the human realm. According to Sendjaya (2010), “Servant leadership stems from a heartfelt conviction and a desire to transform other people with moral courage and spiritual insights into what they are capable of becoming” (p. 45). When evaluating what human flourishing is, it truly is helping others and building them up. It is not about you and your wants and desires. It is about the willingness to let go of self and serve those who need it most. This brings us to the summer of 2024 when I had the privilege of serving at the New Mexico Dream Center after the entire village of Ruidoso, New Mexico was mandated to evacuate.

Bringing Hope Through Serving

Several fires surrounded the Ruidoso Downs, New Mexico area, on June 17, 2024. The entire village was mandated to evacuate. Roads were closed. The only way out was the road towards Roswell, New Mexico. In less than 3 hours, shelters were being formed across the town of Roswell to house the evacuees from the fires. For the first time in years, the community came together and was united as one. 3 John 1:2 [NKJV], 1996 reads, “Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers”. I had the opportunity to work at the New Mexico Dream Center for two weeks where we hosted multiple families. Some lost everything, and others had everything to return to, except the structures around them were gone. Even amid chaos and uncertainty, the church served those in need.

A Resting Place

The evacuees who were served were so thankful for everything. For Ruidoso, Roswell has always had a bad taste in their mouth – as the town does not have the best reputation. Their minds were changed by the hospitality, the love, the safe place, the hope, the prayers, and the overwhelming support of donations, money, and food that

were provided to help get them back on their feet. The most beautiful thing I witnessed was forming a circle and praying for rain. New Mexico rarely gets rain, and people were in doubt. We needed the rain fast to help put out the fires. It was a Tuesday, and it was not scheduled to rain until later in the week. Within hours, it began to pour. The fires were slowly contained and put out. However, with nothing to stop the rain, floods came and destroyed properties and homes, and more homes were lost rather than saved. The Ruidoso Fires destroyed over 1,400 structures. Another version of 3 John 1:2 (*New Living Translation, 1996*) reads, “Dear friend, I hope all is well with you and that you are as healthy in body as you are strong in spirit.” This scripture signifies your body is healthy and your mind is of Christ. When I think of human flourishing, I think of a safe place, a peaceful resting place, somewhere you feel comfortable to grow and be yourself, and you are being nourished or you are helping to nourish others.

Self-Pleasing and Self-Gratification Human Flourishing

Mark Batterson (2017) wrote in his book *Whisper: How to Hear the Voice of God* that it was Paul who stated, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition” (p. 87). God wants to kill our selfish ambition and create a godly ambition. The real question is, why are you doing what you are doing? What is the motivation behind your intention? Batterson wrote, “We’re all driven by too much selfish ambition, but none of us has nearly enough godly ambition” (p. 87). Do not let your intentions be the wrong motives – always have the mind of Christ.

Check Your Ego

Before even doing the task, we must check our ego at the door. Every day, we must surrender ourselves to Christ at the altar. If you do not have an altar, surrender yourself on your knees. Commit each day before the Lord. If you do not check your ego, your mission and purpose could end up being all about you. Batterson (2017) advised, “Having pride is letting ego have the loudest voice. And attempting to do God’s will in a spirit of pride is two steps forward, three steps back” (p. 88).

What is Your Mission?

Human flourishing is not always about yourself, your wants, and your desires. It is having the right motive of why you are doing what you are doing. If you are trying too hard to complete the task, you might be trying for the wrong reasons (Batterson, 2017, p. 88). If you are trying too hard, this could be an indicator you are not ready for the blessing. God is still equipping you for your mission. This could also indicate that what you are chasing is an idol in your life. Batterson wrote, “An idol is anything you desire more than God, and that includes God-given dreams and God-ordained callings” (p.

88). It often takes dying to our flesh, our wants, and placing them at the feet of Jesus, surrendering them over. Later, Jesus might give those desires back to us. He has to know we are ready to flourish, but he first needs all of us and this includes the idols.

Keep Your Emotions in Check

God gave us our emotions. He created us all in his image. When it comes to our emotions, do not make decisions when you are emotionally unstable—in an emotional state or stylish mood. This will only get you in trouble. Making rash and emotional decisions gets us in trouble. We may do something we will regret—like getting a tattoo or buying a new car (nice new payment). You did not think of signing up for a marathon without training. I have done this many times. This is self-pleasing and self-gratification. I enjoy running. I like the high I get from completing a race, although prepping for the race is much more enjoyable than competing without any training. James 1:19 (NKJV, 1996) reads, “So, then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath, for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.” When dealing with our emotions, we need to keep ourselves in check, examining if we are doing the will of God.

Discerning the Choice

Before making a decision, sometimes the best thing to do is wait. Wait on the Lord for direction. Sometimes waiting is the best decision. When we wait to make a decision, the desire for the decision will either get stronger or weaker or go away. When you wait on Jesus and surrender your wishes to him, as you wait, if your urge to make the decision gets stronger, this could be a good possibility that it is from God. If the desire goes away, let it be, as it was not of God or the timing is not right (Batterson, 2017, p. 89).

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is a gift from God. Knowing how to use your emotional intelligence is being aware of what is going on around you. As we grow closer to God, we become more aware of our emotional intelligence and emotional awareness. We must know how to discern and help those in need. We must be willing to die to our flesh, pick up our cross, and follow Jesus. Romans 12:2 (NKJV, 1996) reads, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” We must daily renew our minds and keep our eyes focused on Christ. It is not about our self-pleasing or self-gratification but about serving and reaching others for Jesus.

I Can Only Imagine

When looking at human flourishing, the song “I Can Only Imagine” comes to mind. When viewing the movie of the same name, I finally understood the meaning behind the song. Bart Millard, the author of the song, had a band called Mercy Me, and they were trying to make it big. However, their music just was not making it. So, the producer deal told them to create something off the chart. Growing up, Bart’s father was a drunk, and his mother left him at a young age. Music was his outlet. His father would often tell Bart that he was never going to amount to anything, but Bart believed he was somebody. Bart took choir in school. There, he found his gift for singing. He went on the road and sang a few gigs. Later, his father was extremely sick. Bart took time off to be with his dad. Even though his dad was mean to him growing up, Bart found a way to serve him unconditionally until his last breath.

Human flourishing is also willing to go the extra mile and never give up – knowing your success, your worth, and your value. Bart never gave up. After his father passed away, he released his powerful hit song “I Can Only Imagine.” Bart imagined being with his father. The story behind the song has passion and fire to speak to those who are hurting, going through trials, and thinking of quitting. Bart never gave up and remained steadfast in his faith. He used his talents to glorify God and to reach the lost and hurting.

Achieving Goals and Teachable Moments

Servant leadership is not about yourself but about helping to lead others to successful moments. One of my greatest accomplishments is not being successful but watching others become successful in their career path. As a professor, my favorite moment is when students start to believe in themselves like you believe in them. Kent M. Keith (2024) wrote, “You need to know yourself so you can lead authentically. You also need to know what impacts you have on others, so you can lead *effectively*” (p. 32).

You might be asking yourself, What does it mean to truly know who you are? What does it mean to be a servant leader who helps others flourish? It is not about where you go. It is about who you know. I would imagine you have had flourishing moments where you climbed your highest mountain to achieve your biggest accomplishments. I have had to overcome many obstacles to be where I am today. Growing up, I did not know who I was. I did not have the confidence to flourish, I believed the lies I was told by my peers and some teachers. As I grew older and more mature, I allowed people to speak the truth into my life. I realized my true destiny. I had to find out who I was, who I was as a person, who I was as an individual, and truly know who I was in Christ.

According to Henri Nouwen (2013), “Life is God’s initiative and can end or change suddenly, unexpectedly, and unpredictably. When we humans are ready to give up hope and resign ourselves to inevitability, God intervenes and reveals new beginnings” (p. 86). I think we could all agree that *life happens* and is *uncontrollable*. Many times I have wanted to throw in the towel. I have thought multiple times in my teaching career, Am I truly making a difference? Is it worth the pain and sacrifice? In the darkest moments of my life, the moments when I wanted to quit or ended up having another medical procedure (I have had more than most people), it was then I realized how much God was working everything out for my good. He was behind the scenes doing his construction work when I was on the front lines thinking I was not going to make it. If I had quit during the hard times in my life, I would never have accomplished the victories in my life. God has intervened multiple times. He has shown up and proved to me time and time again that he is the God of miracles.

Flourishing Effective Communication

Human flourishing and effective communication go hand in hand. It is hard for one to flourish if they do not have effective communication. Human flourishing is serving our neighbor. According to Michael Berg (2020), “God serves our neighbors through us as we carry out our vocations” (p. 5). Vocation is just a fancy word for calling or career. Each person on earth was created in God’s precious image, and each individual has a calling in their life. Some are called to be mothers, wives, lawyers, teachers, doctors, nurses, technical workers, etc. As Christians, we are set apart, no matter what our vocation is. We are called to perform acts of love – to love our neighbor as Christ loved the church. This means you are to stand apart – not be part of the crowd (Berg, 2020). Human flourishing and effective communication is being able to understand the three phases of intercultural communication. Hofstede et al. (2010) elaborated on the three phases of intercultural communication: awareness, knowledge, and skills.

Awareness means you are aware of the culture and what is taking place mentally. This is realizing everyone you interact with was brought up differently. Developing effective communication within human flourishing is being aware of each individual so you can serve them well.

Knowledge might be self-explanatory; however, to interact with other cultures, one must know the culture. According to Hofstede et al. (2010), “We should learn about their symbols, their heroes, and their rituals; while we may never share their values, we may at least get an intellectual grasp of where their values differ from ours” (p. 420). To serve others well, we must be willing to learn their culture, so we can communicate effectively, as well as relate to them.

The third phase – *skills* – is putting Phases 1 and 2 into practice. This means we must be willing to apply the skills we have learned about our culture, so we can effectively communicate to help them flourish in their careers and be able to serve them well. Remember, servant leadership is not about us, it is about meeting the needs of those we encounter to help them thrive and flourish in their career path. Hofstede et al. (2010) wrote, “Persons with unduly inflated egos, a low personal tolerance for uncertainty, a history of emotional stability, or known racist or extreme left- or right-wing political sympathies should be bad risks for a training program” (p. 420). Intercultural communication is truly knowing who you are working with, setting aside your needs and wants, and focusing on their needs and wants. It is hard to serve those in need if you are always focused on your wants and desires. Effective communication is understanding the culture you are working with.

Trust and Rapport

It is natural to think we can just walk up to someone and build trust and rapport to get into their bubble. Wrong! We have to build trust over time. This is the same with helping someone to flourish; you cannot just jump in their bubble and expect them to be your bestie. Zetta Hammond (2015) wrote, “Rapport is generally defined as a ‘sympathetic connection’ with another person that results in that warm, friendly feeling you get when you are in sync” (p. 75). Being in sync means you are connected. Being connected means affirmation. Affirmation means “I get you!” which means you care about them (Hammond, 2015, p. 76). To build effective communication, you have to show the individual, group, or team that you care and have compassion. It is important to build trust so you can have effective communication. Once you have effective communication, you can help them to flourish. Human flourishing is helping those around you to grow and flourish beyond yourself. It is act of selfless love. Hammond wrote, “You can try to speed the trust-building process, but feeling connected grows slowly and requires time for people to get to know each other” (p. 77). These interactions happen on a day-to-day basis. Growing rapport happens with your motives, your character, and your words and reassuring them they can do anything with Christ. Serving those in need comes from your heart; it is dying to your flesh and serving beyond your means.

Conclusion

Human flourishing is letting go of self, serving those in need, and building rapport and trust, so you can have effective communication in a diverse society. Human flourishing is being successful, finding contentment within the chaos, finding peace during moments of hurt, overcoming hurdles, and not letting lies stop you from achieving your greatest accomplishment. Human flourishing is serving others before yourself, helping

others achieve their dreams, and cheering them on while they make their mark. Servant leadership and human flourishing are knowing your limits, using effective communication, understanding others' cultures, and knowing with God all things are possible. Simon Sinek (2014) wrote, "The world around us is filled with danger. Filled with things trying to make our lives miserable. It's nothing personal; it's just the way it is" (p. 25). The world will try and tear you down, people will try and misguide you; however, God is always there for you. He has placed a calling on each of our lives, and it is up to us to listen to his still small voice. People will fail you. The world will fail you. But Jesus will never fail you.

Author's Biography

Dr. Jamie Wright has been teaching in academia since 2013. She has excelled in the career path she has chosen. Dr. Wright is an Associate Professor, with the speech faculty for New Mexico Military Institute, where she teaches Public Speaking, Intercultural Communication, Interpersonal Communication, and Introduction to Communication, and is in charge of the Ruppert-Burton Speech Contest. She is resilient, loved by her students and colleagues, and always goes the extra mile. She earned her Doctor of Strategic Leadership degree in May 2021 from Regent University in Virginia Beach, Virginia, where she was a Doctoral Fellow for the School of Communication. She is a 2017 graduate from Eastern New Mexico University where she obtained a Master of Arts in Communication. In 2012, she graduated with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Psychology from West Virginia University of Parkersburg, West Virginia.

Dr. Wright has been extremely successful not only in her academic career but in her personal life as well. She loves to do research and edit scholarly papers and books for colleagues and former students. She enjoys spending time with her husband, Chris, and her two chocolate Labs – Biscuit and Beau Jangles. For fun, Jamie enjoys running marathons, traveling the world, serving in the community, attending sporting events, gardening, attending church, serving at church events, and spending time with friends and family. She has a love for the educational system, a passion for helping students thrive in and out of the classroom and mentoring students on the career path they have chosen. She is one of a kind and the best in my eyes. Even in her darkest hours, her hope was found in Jesus. Jesus has been her guide and continues to lead her on the path on which he has called her.

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A Mentor's Journey ... I Get It!

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Roundtable: Servant Leadership

Abstract

This personal essay walks the reader through the career path of an educator, illustrating personal and professional growth all along the way – including the transformational impact of earning a DSL degree from Regent University in 2007. Key takeaways: gold nuggets, lessons learned, questions for further reflection, references to Robert Greenleaf and other major influencers in the servant leadership arena, as well as recommendations for further reading give the reader an opportunity to utilize this life journey reflection as a personal tool for self-assessment and growth.

Keywords: servant leadership, relationship, emotional intelligence, passion, calling, community, shepherd, innovation, second half, servant, listening, accountable

Introduction

In college, I must admit I chose education as a major because that was the vocation I had seen modeled the most. I remember sitting in those initial pre-service classes and sometimes doubting myself. Am I up for this? How will I become competent in working with students every day? Do I have the grit? Do I even want to do it?

But, my instructors had a passion for their craft, and that influenced me. One in particular, Dr. Pearson, exuded a love for learning and critical thinking, and I gravitated to his disposition. He seemed to dedicate his best to his work as if it were a calling. Was I called to teach? I think I was – while sitting in his class my sophomore year, learning from his discernment and his pushing back on some traditional schooling practices and the status quo mindset.

Yet, when do you really know for sure? The first day I had my own students, my apprehensions disappeared. Something deep inside kicked in, and off I went. I was a

teacher – indeed such an honorable profession. And I enjoyed it ... I was fulfilled ... I did feel called. I thanked God for what I strongly felt was His hand in all of this. I had relied on my Christian faith to take me down the right career path, and it did.

Oh my, year one ... I lost my voice about halfway through the fall. I met so many people in my home community I had not known before. And I coached athletics after school. When the end of the second semester rolled around, and I could actually catch my breath, I was exhausted – but also, I realized I could do this and do it well. The kids were a blessing to me more than they realized. I loved the spontaneity of a creative classroom. I loved being a positive role model. I loved the focus on meaningful work. My undergrad profs would have been proud of me, but still, I did not quite get it. Soon I was back in school, working on my master's, then school administration certification, and in what seemed like a quantum leap in time, I had 12 years under my belt as a teacher. The bell tolled, and in the middle of the summer just before going into year 13, I was called on to serve as the principal of a P-8 school. Oh my, from the frying pan into the fire! But I loved it. I was solving problems for people all day long. My wife said I came home much later in the evenings but with a smile on my face. I focused on reinventing where needed – whether the master schedule, turning staff loose with new initiatives, embracing innovation in the classroom, or inviting parents in to truly be a part of the school's community. Peter Block (2018) wrote about the critical need across our society for a return to community groups that fellowship and work together, and the school setting is a natural fit for this culture of relationship and belonging. When I later heard him speak at the Greenleaf Servant Leadership Conference in Indianapolis, his message resonated with me.

School-level leadership is one of the most influential positions one can hold. How many jobs can one think of where you get to talk to hundreds of people every morning on an intercom to help them start their day? Speak to a gymnasium full of kids? Be recognized as a leader in the community and region? Invest in and grow a staff of professional colleagues? Sit around the leadership team table with the superintendent as one of the key influencers in moving the school district forward? But, still, I did not quite get it. The average shelf life of a school principal is four years (Donley et al., 2020). I made it eight and a half. And just like that, my turn at the local school level was over. I was 43, I had given what I had felt was my best, and my track record landed me at the State Department of Education serving new school principals as a leadership consultant – mainly a provider of support, a shepherd. Again, I loved this new work! I logged many miles, day after day, visiting young leaders in schools all over half of the state. I could not believe I had fallen into such a gig, and I instantly found new energy and passion. Bob Buford (2015) called this renewal of life purpose the second half, and it does often include following the call to new work. This privilege to help mold young talent, to give back from the other side of the desk, had been an epiphany for me that previous summer at home with my wife and our two young girls. I was painting our

farm's fence in front of the house, and it came to me in an instant, "You are burned out, spent. How many other principals are feeling the same way across the state right now? Help them." But, still, I did not quite get it. Eventually, something down inside told me to go back to school! What? Why? I was in the second half of my career and had transitioned to an education cooperative much like a think tank that provides services to schools and districts. At this stage, this was perfect for me. Creative, innovative work providing support to our colleagues down in the trenches. But that voice within kept nagging at me to begin doctoral study. And so, I did. And oh my, what a priceless journey those four years offered me. The focus of the program was servant leadership. The emerging research on the topic – how the practice of this lifestyle changes self, lends authentic care and support to others, and transforms organizations – was fascinating to me. And we zeroed in on Ken Blanchard's quadrant: leading self, coaching others, developing healthy teams, and growing a healthy organization (Blanchard, 2018). Soon afterward, I heard Larry Spears speak and was thrilled to have the opportunity to meet him and chat for a few minutes. Larry was well known internationally for his scholarship in the domain of servant leadership. His mining from Robert Greenleaf's writings on the 10 key characteristics of servant leadership spoke to me. These North Star nuggets are listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community (Spears, 2018). So, I began integrating servant leadership principles and resources more into my work. But, still, I did not quite get it. Soon after earning my doctoral degree in strategic leadership, I was offered a position to teach in higher ed. The timing was perfect for me to jump into working with graduate students who were training to be school administrators. I remember the first day walking across campus to my new office. I could not believe it! Was this real? I was actually a college professor? I loved every minute of it, and my students loved studying about servant leadership and how it can transform a school into a culture of care, relationship, trust, accountability, and innovation. I soon realized that in education circles, the works of Blanchard, Greenleaf, Spears, John Maxwell, Stephen Covey and many other well-respected authors who wrote in the servant leadership camp were not being read as much as they needed to be by teachers and school-level leaders. Their message was compelling: Our life's work is not about personal achievement and external accolades in the manner in which the world defines success. Instead, it is about unselfish purpose. But, still, I did not quite get it. For the last 17 years, this walk in higher education and learning more and more about servant leadership has been such a priceless journey. My students have let me know over and over this increased focus on serving and creating a stronger culture of care in the school setting is needed, and they embrace it. I am blessed beyond measure to have the privilege to do this work. And I love the focus in academia on the latest research and sharing our new findings. Recently, a colleague from another university sent me his new book, *Servant Teaching: Practices for Renewing Christian Higher Education* (Schultz, 2022). Once I looked inside, oh my, such a jewel! The

short read explained, page after page, how to facilitate a college classroom in the true spirit of serving. From learning all student names from Day 1 (before Day 1) to creating every class session to be rich and alive, listening to students more, dropping the overwhelming and often almost worthless busy work, doing much less of “this is how I did it” and building much more true community. This reading was inspiring to me. I had been on the right track all along – however, still missing the mark a bit. All these years I have, indeed, been growing as a teacher. All these years I have made sure I plugged into every course what I considered important content. All these years I have, indeed, mentored, lecturing on and hopefully modeling the virtues of this and that. I have generally tried to learn the names of students and build quality relationships with them. But also in all these years, I have not really considered much (enough) that any legacy we leave as educators, any long-term memories a student has of how we might have positively affected their life, any significant growth they may have attained under our care. These outcomes depend on one thing: genuine care for every student, as if they are the neighbor next door – not mainly an ID number that will need a grade attached by the end of term. David Brooks (2023) identified this intentional connecting by genuine listening and understanding as the art of knowing others and being known. I get it! If even one student, in any course, is left feeling like they were not connected well to me or as if I had not had the time to focus on their work and circumstances fully and with a teacher's bent toward mentoring with attention and care, then I have failed – at least to a degree. Over the years, I have attended several leadership conferences led by John Maxwell and heard him teach over and over that growing people is one of any leader's most important responsibilities. Scouting for talent, developing talent, and multiplying talent (Maxwell, 2020). My work is about investing in positive ways in others. It is a paying forward of sorts. I decrease, others increase. Yes, I do get it.

Nuggets That Help Keep Me Centered

1. A fulfilling, unselfish life is not about our wants and acquisitions, but instead God's call to make a positive difference in the lives of others.
2. A servant's heart is about investing in others and helping them grow into their full potential.
3. Finding my voice is not finding my comforts, but instead being in touch with who I genuinely am on the inside, and then helping others find their voice.
4. The model of Christ (wash their feet, feed My sheep), and His core values of love God, love others, and make disciples is the answer to addiction to narcissism and causing pain for others.
5. The legacy we leave is not a résumé of accomplishments, but a lifetime of unselfish purpose.

Lessons Learned in the Higher Ed Classroom

1. Students can tell when we are engaged in the class with them.
2. When we are real, students will be more real and be more engaged in the course content.
3. Humor, taking time for community, and the sharing of concerns – showing interest in students as more than subjects in a class.
4. Students know they need to be held accountable, but doing that with grace makes all the difference.
5. Developing and seeing the class more from the students' perspective will make the experience for them so much more memorable and fulfilling. Yes, we have an important task to complete, and so do they. But we should see ourselves as leaders of leaders. They know when we care on a level deeper than merely getting them to the academic finish line.

The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer, is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived? (Greenleaf, 2002, p. 22)

Questions for Further Reflection:

1. Can you remember a teacher who modeled authentic servant leadership for you and your classmates?
2. What is your process for creating a culture of care in your classroom?
3. Have you had specific training in the domain of servant leadership and emotional intelligence in your school or department?
4. Is your organization servant-focused? If so, how is this growing the workplace in healthy ways?
5. Are you able to remember the names of your students, where they are from, and what is unique about them?
6. What is one strategy you would recommend to other educators on how to transition from being too content-driven at the expense of being relationship-centered?

Recommendations for Further Reading

- Leadership and Self-Deception. The Arbinger Institute.
- The 8th Habit. Stephen R. Covey.
- Necessary Endings. Henry Cloud.

- The Courage to Teach. Parker Palmer.
- Primal Leadership (Unleashing the Power of Emotional Intelligence). Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, and Annie McKee.
- Strengthening the Heartbeat. Thomas Sergiovanni.
- Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership. Samuel D. Rima and Gary L. McIntosh.
- Atomic Habits. James Clear.
- Long Journey Home. Oz Guinness.
- The Road Less Traveled. Scott Peck.
- Service in the Trenches—School Principals Share True Stories of Servant Leadership. Edited by Rocky Wallace, Eve Proffitt, and Stephanie Sullivan.

About the Author

Rocky came to Campbellsville University in the fall of 2018 to help develop the graduate education leadership program. He had previously served in a similar capacity at Asbury University and Morehead State University.

A former school principal of a U.S. Blue Ribbon School, Rocky has served as a consultant to school principals for the Kentucky Department of Education, and as director of instructional support and adult education at the Kentucky Education Development Corporation. He has authored/co-authored, edited/co-edited 12 books on servant leadership and school improvement for Rowman & Littlefield.

Rocky and his wife Denise co-pastor Claylick United Methodist Church near Lawrenceburg, Ky., and have two grown daughters, Lauren and Bethany, granddaughter Corrie, 6, and grandson Cade, 4.

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Leadership and Innovation: A Framework for Organizational Change Through Servant Leadership Constructs

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Roundtables: Transformative Innovation

Abstract

This article presents a novel approach to understanding the role of leadership in fostering organizational innovation by focusing on the intrinsic qualities that define an innovative leader. Unlike traditional leadership models that emphasize the actions leaders must take to drive innovation, this study highlights the dispositional attributes that inherently predispose leaders to be innovative. Through a comprehensive literature review, the article examines various leadership styles, including transformational, transactional, ethical, ambidextrous, and entrepreneurial leadership, highlighting their reliance on the leader's influence over followers to achieve innovative outcomes. Among these, servant leadership is identified as uniquely effective due to its follower-centric approach, which prioritizes the development, well-being, and empowerment of followers above organizational goals. A servant leadership construct is proposed, and a mapping exercise is conducted tracing the constructs to empirical evidence that supports their role in producing positive innovation results. The study concludes by proposing a framework that maps servant leadership constructs to specific innovative behaviors and outcomes, offering a structured approach to understanding the direct influence of servant leadership traits on innovation. This research contributes to the leadership and innovation discourse by advocating for a shift from action-based leadership strategies to a focus on the essential characteristics that define truly innovative leaders.

Introduction

Innovation is the lifeblood of any corporation, crucial for maintaining competitiveness and industry influence in both prosperous and challenging times. As Thomas Kelley (2001) emphasized, innovation enables a company to grow faster, better, and smarter than its competitors. In times of economic downturn, the ability to innovate can be the difference between survival and obsolescence. Schwartz (2004) further noted that

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investors often base their confidence in a company's future on its capacity for innovation. Therefore, leaders must prioritize creating an innovative culture to assure stakeholders of the company's long-term viability. The ability to innovate is no longer optional but a necessity for thriving in today's competitive business landscape.

Traditional innovation methodologies often impose significant changes that can lead to internal resistance and inefficiencies. May (2007) pointed out that getting "better" is important when a company has maximized its efficiency but being "different" is essential for survival. Historically, the authoritarian leadership style was prized in the pursuit of high-output organization. Under the traditional authoritative style of leadership, followers who face challenges that require cooperation and creativity tend to outsource their primary functioning to the leader, resulting in organizations being rigid to change (Morgan, 2006, p. 29). Oster (2010) described how overreliance on these traditional business strategies results in "innovation antibodies" that drive innovative employees underground (p. 569). Contrary to the demands of high output experienced by traditionally authoritarian organizations, modern organizations are facing the pressure of increased competition, rapidly changing environments, and shifting consumer interests (Daft, 2001). In the current competitive business environment, organizations are required to prioritize innovation as a fundamental strategy to maintain a sustainable competitive advantage (Ting, 2012).

Oster (2010) emphasized that corporate leadership must shift from tradition to entrepreneurial innovation and uplifting impediments and roadblocks to localized innovation within the organization, allowing the once-underground innovators to emerge. The role of leadership in unlocking a dynamic, innovative organization is emphasized by the change in leadership style from authoritarian to leadership styles, including but not limited to transactional, charismatic, transformational, ethical, and sustainable (Gresov, 1984; Iqbal et al., 2021; Ullah et al., 2021). A common thread amongst these emerging leadership styles is the focus on increasing the effectiveness and performance of the organization's employees. By enhancing the performance of the employee, leaders can gain organizational performance benefits and position their organization for innovative success. Though early research focused broadly on both internal and external means that drive innovation (Davis-Blake & Pfeffer, 1989; Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Rogers, 1983), more recent research has emphasized the role of the leader as a crucial component of organizational innovation (Howell & Higgins, 1990).

Research has uncovered clear evidence that organizational leadership and top-level management have a direct impact on organizational innovation (Alblooshi et al., 2020; Elenkov & Manev, 2005; Hunter & Cushenbery, 2011; Waite, 2014). Hunter and Cushenbery (2011) posited that leaders play a pivotal role in shaping innovative outcomes by transitioning their emphasis from fostering idea generation among

individuals and teams to selectively determining which products and services should be advanced to market. They are also tasked with overcoming opposition to change and reconciling the interests of various stakeholder groups. An organization's top management is responsible for enabling the means of innovation including setting the right organizational structure and culture suitable for innovation (Lee et al., 2023; Llopis, 2017).

Howell and Higgins (1990) found that leadership personality is crucial to achieving tangible innovations, titling the leader as an innovation *champion* who embodies risk taking, influence, and innovativeness. Leaders extend their desire for an innovative culture amongst the organization most notably through organizational learning, knowledge sharing, and empowerment (Liao et al., 2017; Mai et al., 2022; Shafique et al., 2019). Ullah et al. (2021) cited the leader's responsibility to impact and balance human capital (skills and creativity) and social capital (resources). Steele and Watts (2022) came to a similar conclusion, citing how traits and behaviors (self-efficacy and empowerment) work together with leadership actions to influence group behavior, resulting in innovation success.

Leadership Impact on Innovation

Howell and Higgins (1990) boldly challenged previous assertions that a leader's personality is less important than external effects in influencing employee sentiment in organizational settings. Their findings suggested that by ignoring dispositional attributes, one neglects major variables relevant to achieving organizational innovation. In their follow-up study, Howell and Avolio (1993) attributed these dispositional variables to those found within the transformational leader. Based on the seminal work of Bass (1985), Howell and Avolio concluded that the charismatic traits of a transformational leader, including individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and idealized influence, are the primary leadership attributes that influence innovation.

Research published since Howell and Avolio (1993) has confirmed these findings, supporting the positive correlation between transformational leadership and organizational innovation (Cui et al., 2022; Jung et al., 2008; Pieterse et al., 2009). Researchers have also uncovered mediating traits and behaviors that supplement and clarify the relationship between transformational leadership and innovation. Le (2020) found psychological human capital, through the installment of self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience, to mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational innovation. Pieterse et al. (2009) found that empowerment and creative self-efficacy behaviors mediate the relationship. Trust and individual identification were found to play an intermediary role in the relationship between organizational innovation and transformational leadership (Y. Xie et al., 2018).

Transactional leadership is commonly chosen as an alternative to the transformational leadership style due to its close ties with the theories proposed by Bass (1985). Although some researchers have found transactional leadership to have a negative effect on innovation (Costa et al., 2023; Pieterse et al., 2009), others find that it can support innovation if mediated by trust, organizational learning, and organizational culture (Cui et al., 2022; Sethibe & Steyn, 2015; Y. Xie et al, 2018).

Despite the common themes of transformational and transactional leadership that emerge when digging into the impact of leadership on innovation, empirical study has found support for alternative styles that impact innovation. Leadership styles such as ambidextrous, entrepreneurial, developmental, ethical, strategic, sustainable, and servant leadership are all included in this body of research into the topic. A common theme among the leadership styles included in these studies is the focus on unlocking the potential of an organization's members. This includes the aforementioned transformational leader's qualities of intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, idealized influence, and individualized consideration, which are all designed to boost the effectiveness of the individual (Cui et al., 2022; Howell & Avolio, 1993; Rehman et al., 2019). The components of transactional leadership including contingent reward, active management by exception, and passive management by exception are similarly designed to enhance the individual performance first, all to produce positive organizational outcomes.

Despite the body of research that suggests that follower-centric leadership styles result in greater innovation outcomes, there is very little consensus over the specific leadership traits and behaviors that are correlated with a positive impact on organizational innovation. Research remains unclear on identifying a single leadership profile that is optimal for innovation. Considering these discoveries, this article attempts to answer the Research Question 1 (RQ1): What are the key traits and behaviors of a leader that positively impact innovation in organizations?

Literature Review

Leadership and Innovation

To explore RQ1, a literature review is conducted on the topic of leadership influence on innovation. Research data pools included the Regent University Library, powered by PRIMO, in addition to Google Scholar. Keyword search terms included "leadership," "impact/influence," "organization/organizational," and "innovation" in various phrase structures with the goal of uncovering the largest breadth of relevant sources possible. Criteria for inclusion consisted of studies that were peer reviewed and offered empirical support for their theories with data-driven methodologies.

Studies that have focused on the leadership type or style that influenced organizational innovation and noted specific characteristics, traits, or behaviors that correlated with positive innovation results were considered for inclusion. Though many studies unpack tactical implementations made by top management to unlock innovation, this literature focuses on studies that unpack the specific leadership qualities (traits, behaviors, attributes) that impact innovation.

Additional filtering criteria were applied based on the type of innovation studied. Although research into organizational innovation is expansive, there is very little in terms of a universally accepted definition for innovation (Sethibe & Steyn, 2015). Several interpretations and definitions have been brought forth by researchers; however, for the purpose of avoiding ambiguous definitions of innovation, the literature review into the effect of leadership on innovation will focus on 4 innovation types; organizational innovative performance (OIP), innovative work behavior (IWB), product/process/R&D innovation, and technological innovation. Literature review findings are summarized in the following section, segmented by innovation type.

Findings

An initial review of the literature on RQ1 uncovered 47 relevant studies. However, 10 studies were removed from consideration due to poor definitions of organizational innovation or methodologies that rely on theoretical support rather than empirical. A total of 37 studies were considered for further review. Each article was scanned for results that link a specific leadership “trait,” “behavior/behaviour,” “attribute,” or “characteristic” to positive innovation outcomes, agnostic of the leadership style that was studied. A summary of the findings is discussed, followed by a table summarizing the results. The conclusion of the literature review is used to propose a hypothesis based on the findings addressing RQ1.

Organizational Innovative Performance

OIP has been offered as the overall ability of an organization to generate, accept, and implement innovations (Drucker, 1985) It involves the organization’s capacity to create a culture that fosters innovation, leading to improved performance and competitiveness (Ahsan et al., 2021). Damanpour (1991) provided a more focused definition applicable to the organizational context, stating that OIP is the adoption of an idea or behavior that is new to the organization.

Several studies have concluded that the presence of transformational leadership among an organization’s top management has a positive effect on OIP (Al-Husseini et al., 2019; Jung et al., 2008; Li et al., 2018; Sethibe & Steyn, 2015). Systemic organizational learning processes emerge in research as a mediator of the relationship between transformational leadership and OIP (Cui et al. 2022; Liao et al., 2017; Rehman et al., 2019). Rehman et al.

(2019) described organizational learning as a change in behavior or cognition within an organization that enables the development of a range of innovative behaviors. This definition aligns with Cui et al.'s (2022) perspective, who viewed organizational learning as a change in the organization's knowledge that arises from experience. Liao et al. (2017) contributed to this understanding by highlighting that organizational learning involves the development of organizational knowledge, moving away from a purely behaviorist interpretation of learning. Additionally, Nguyen et al. (2023) found that transformational leadership is a significant predictor of employee creativity and that creativity mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and OIP. Y. Xie et al. (2018) found empirical support for trust and individual identity as necessary mediators for transformational leaders to positively influence OIP.

Sethibe and Steyn (2015) found that transactional leadership has a positive influence on OIP but only when organizational innovative culture is high. Rehman et al. (2019) and Cui et al. (2022) found organizational learning to be a required mediator between transactional leadership and OIP. Y Xie et al. (2018) found high trust to moderate the relationship between transactional leadership and OIP, where a lack of organizational trust renders transactional leadership ineffective for OIP. Alternatively, Howell and Avolio (1993) found transactional leadership to have a negative effect on OIP. This finding is supported by Nguyen et al. (2023), who found transactional leadership to hurt OIP and creativity.

Alblooshi et al. (2020), in their systematic review of the relationship between leadership styles and OIP, found that an ambidextrous leadership style is optimal for improved OIP. Their ambidextrous leadership model includes a blend of qualities from transformational leadership, charismatic leadership, humorous leadership, servant leadership, and self-leadership to influence the behaviors of empowerment, trust, creativity, motivation, and belonging. Zacher and Rosing (2015) supported this finding and expanded on it by highlighting ambidextrous leadership's positive influence on OIP by means of opening (encouraging exploration, stimulating divergent thinking, providing flexibility, resource allocation for new ventures) and closing (encouraging exploitation, implementing and standardizing processes, monitoring and controlling, rewarding efficiency and results) behaviors.

Waite (2014) found that developmental leadership, with its focus on leadership capacity building, has a positive influence on OIP. Waite cited the developmental leadership model provided by Gilley et al. (2011) who defined developmental leadership as the process of equipping people with the knowledge, skills, and opportunities they need to grow, develop, change, and become more effective. Shafique et al. (2019), in their empirical study into ethical leadership on OIP, found that knowledge sharing and empowerment work together to produce creativity and that creativity mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and OIP. Waite alternatively proposed a

theoretical link between servant leadership and OIP through its focus on communication, vision, concern for others, and a global mindset. Hughes et al. (2018) provided empirical support for this claim and found servant leadership to have a positive influence on OIP and creativity.

Organizational Innovative Work Behavior. Organizational IWB is a broad-stroke term for innovative performance as applied to the individual of the organization. IWB refers to the actions of individuals or teams within an organization that are directed towards the initiation and intentional application of new ideas, products, processes, or procedures to the workplace (De Jong & Den Hartog, 2010; Janssen, 2000). West and Farr (1990) earlier conceptualized IWB as behaviors aimed at the intentional introduction and application of new and useful ideas, processes, products, or procedures. Organizational IWB focuses on the behaviors exhibited by employees within the organization that contribute to innovation (Dedahanov et al., 2017).

Pieterse et al. (2009) in their empirical study found that transformational leadership had a positive effect on IWB, but only when empowerment was high (Afsar & Umrani, 2020). Pieterse et al. additionally concluded that transactional leadership had an overall negative effect on IWB. Afsar and Umrani (2020) found that innovation climate, task complexity, and motivation to learn mediated the relationship between transformational leadership and IWB. Berdecia-Cruz et al. (2022) found empirical support for the influence of gender on transactional leadership effectiveness, concluding that female leaders were more strongly associated with positive transactional leadership outcomes for IWB.

Odoardi et al. (2015) found support for their hypotheses that participative leadership, if combined with teamwork and information sharing, positively predicted perceptions of team support for innovation and team vision, which, in turn, fostered psychological empowerment and IWB. Berdecia-Cruz et al. (2022) provided empirical support for Llopis' (2017) proposal on innovative mindset leadership, which declares the innovative mentality of leadership enables them to unleash the full potential of the rest of the team members to achieve organizational success. Cited traits of the innovative mindset leader include visionary leadership, risk taking, adaptability, empowerment, collaboration, customer-centricity, continuous learning, and resilience.

Humble leadership (as defined by their possessing open-mindedness, empowerment, and inclusivity) is also linked to positive IWB outcomes when mediated by employee core self-evaluation (CSE) and political skills (Zhou & Wu, 2018). Zhou and Wu (2018) found that CSE moderates the influence of humble leadership personality traits on IWB. Akbari et al. (2020) found support for the positive influence of entrepreneurial leadership on IWB. They found theoretical support for the notion that entrepreneurial

leaders who prioritize employees direct their senses of empowerment, autonomy, and self-determination as behaviors that influence IWB.

Ullah et al. (2021) found that the values encompassed by ethical leadership (open communication, respect, fairness, trust, balanced decision, embolden followers) have a positive influence on IWB. Song et al. (2023) concluded that ethical leadership has a positive influence on IWB but only when the organizational innovative environment is high. Song et al. additionally concluded that servant leadership has a positive influence on IWB and is especially suited for low-innovation organizational environments.

Product/Process/R&D Innovation. Product and process innovation involves the development of new products, services, or processes that offer value to customers and improve operational efficiency (Crossan & Apaydin, 2010). This type of tactical innovation is suited for the employment of customer-facing value. Damanpour and Aravind (2012) referred to process innovations as making minor adjustments or improvements to existing processes to enhance efficiency, reduce costs, or improve quality. These innovations are often evolutionary rather than revolutionary, making them easier to implement and less risky compared to major product overhauls. The emergence of research and development (R&D) units in organizations highlights the structural changes required to break through innovation barriers. R&D innovation practices typically aim at improving the speed, efficiency, or cost-effectiveness of R&D activities. The R&D innovation type can be defined as a classification that differentiates between traditional R&D, which involves formal R&D activities conducted by specialized units, and non-R&D, which encompasses innovation efforts that may not adhere to conventional R&D practices (Tsuji et al., 2018; X. Xie et al., 2019).

Costa et al. (2023) found empirical support for the influence of transformational leadership on product and process innovation and democratic leadership for general innovation. They also found transactional leadership and autocratic leadership to have a negative effect on all three innovation types. The emphasis on employee-centric human capital was found to play a moderating role in the positive influence of democratic and transformational leadership on product, process, and general innovation.

In their research reviews, Llopis (2017) and Kesting et al. (2016) concluded that different stages and types of product, process, and R&D innovation raise different leadership requirements. In their framework, innovation type is decided by the goals of the innovation (bottom of the funnel) and then driven by the leader (top of the funnel). The means and effects used to achieve innovation goals were instrumental in the employment of particular leadership styles including transformational, transactional, charismatic, participative, interactive, and instrumental.

Hou et al. (2019) conducted a survey-based empirical study over benevolent, authoritarian, moral, and paternalistic leadership styles on tangible exploratory (novel product/process/R&D) and exploitative (refine product/process/R&D) innovations. They found support for the positive effect of benevolent and moral leadership on exploratory innovations. Paternalistic leadership was found to have a positive effect on exploitative innovations, while authoritarian leadership had a negative effect on both innovation types. Environmental dynamism played a strong mediating role in all leadership and innovation effects.

Technology Innovation. Technological innovation is characterized by four distinct components including a physical tools component, a codified knowledge component, a human skills component, and a systemized methods component (Hanif et al., 2020; de Vries et al., 2015). A combination of the external and internal components produces successful technological innovation in the marketplace. Technological innovation might also involve the adoption of new technologies and equipment within an organization's products, services, or processes, aiming to enhance operational efficiency and performance (Jia et al., 2022). Nieto (2004) introduced a nuanced view of this concept, describing it as a dynamic process where technical innovations are continuously refined. This process effectively addresses both internal organizational challenges and market demands, thereby not only improving efficiency but also bolstering the relationships between the organization and its employees, as well as with its customers.

Howell and Higgins (1990) and Chen et al. (2012) found empirical support for the positive influence of transformational leadership on technological innovation. Chen et al. found that financial incentive adoption mediated the effects of transformational leadership on technological innovation. Howell and Higgins additionally found entrepreneurial leadership to have a positive influence on technological innovation as a result of its emphasis on risk taking, influence, and innovativeness.

Wanaswa et al. (2021) found strategic leadership to have a positive influence on technological innovation. Energizing, belief in change, and organizational setting (proximity and emphasis of home country) additionally contributed to the effectiveness of strategic leadership on technological innovation. Jiang et al. (2022) concluded that knowledge-oriented leadership, when combined with leader-member exchange (LMX), creates the conditions for technological innovation by creating an atmosphere conducive to knowledge management, openness, inclusiveness, swift trust, mutual trust, and mutual appreciation.

Yang et al. (2023) studied the effects of ambidextrous leadership, transformational leadership, and transactional leadership on technological innovation. They find ambidextrous leadership to surpass transformational and transactional in its effects on technological innovation. They also find employee psychological distance to play a

mediating role in the relationship between ambidextrous leadership and technological leadership.

Summary

Throughout the literature review, several leadership traits and behaviors consistently emerged as closely associated with fostering innovation within organizations. Notable examples include empowerment, creativity, vision, and trust. Moreover, our review revealed a broad spectrum of leadership styles that have been studied for their impact on innovation, including transformational, transactional, ethical, ambidextrous, entrepreneurial, and servant leadership styles. Each of these styles has been associated with various degrees of success in enhancing organizational innovative capacities, often mediated by factors such as organizational culture, global setting, social or political capital, and organizational learning processes. A recurring theme across these studies is the importance of leadership traits that empower and inspire employees, facilitate open communication, and foster a supportive culture conducive to innovation.

The diverse findings among various innovation types, leadership types, noted traits and behaviors, mediators, and external factors that influence innovation are best portrayed through the formation of a table summary. To better analyze the results of the literature review, Table 1 is introduced as a summarization of the literature review findings into a table. Each row represents a unique study and includes (from left to right) an assigned code, the citation, the type of innovation studied, and the leadership type that was studied. A summary of the findings is organized to note if a positive (+) or negative (-) impact was found between the variables studied, including any relevant mediators. Traits and behaviors of leadership with empirical support for their positive impact on innovation were captured, as well as other outside factors, and cited mediators.

Table 1*Leadership Constructs and Organizational Innovation – Literature Review Findings*

No	Citation	Innovation type	Leadership type	Findings summary	Traits and behaviors that impact innovation	Other factors that impact innovation	Mediators
S1	Jiang et al. (2022)	Technological innovation	Knowledge-oriented leadership	Knowledge-oriented leadership (+) LMX (+) Technological innovation	Openness, inclusiveness, swift trust, mutual trust, mutual appreciation	LMX	LMX
S2	Waite (2014)	OIP	Developmental leadership, servant leadership	(Primary) Developmental leadership (+) Organizational innovation (Secondary) Servant leadership (+) Organizational innovation	Communication, vision, concern for others, global mindset	Leadership capacity building	
S3	Alblooshi et al. (2020)	OIP	Ambidextrous leadership	Ambidextrous leadership (+) Organizational innovation	Empowerment, trust, creativity, motivation, belonging		

No	Citation	Innovation type	Leadership type	Findings summary	Traits and behaviors that impact innovation	Other factors that impact innovation	Mediators
S4	Ullah et al. (2021)	IWB	Ethical leadership	Ethical leadership (+) Org. IWBs	creativity, open communication, respect, fairness, trust, balanced decision, empower followers	Social capital (resources)	
S5	Wanasw a et al. (2021).	Technologic al innovation	Strategic leadership	Strategic leadership (+) Technological innovation	Energizing, belief in change	Organizational setting	Strategic leadership
S6	Al-Husseini et al. (2019)	Product innovation	Transformational leadership	Transformational leadership (+) Product innovation	Idealized influence, vision, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration		
S7	Iqbal et al. (2021)	Technologic al innovation	Sustainable leadership	Sustainable leadership (+) Frugal tech innovation		Power distance	Technology turbulence

No	Citation	Innovation type	Leadership type	Findings summary	Traits and behaviors that impact innovation	Other factors that impact innovation	Mediators
						Uncertainty avoidance	Market turbulence
S8	Hou et al. (2019)	OIP	Benevolent leadership, authoritarian leadership, moral leadership, paternalistic leadership	Benevolent leadership (+) Exploratory Moral leadership (+) environmental dynamism (+) Exploratory Paternalistic leadership (+) environmental dynamism (+) Exploitative		Environmental dynamism	Environmental Dynamism

No	Citation	Innovation type	Leadership type	Findings summary	Traits and behaviors that impact innovation	Other factors that impact innovation	Mediators
				Authoritarian leadership (-) Exploratory and exploitative			
S9	Chen et al. (2012)	Technological innovation	Transformational leadership	Transformational leadership (+) Technological innovation	Idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration	Financial incentive adoption (-)	
S10	Shafique et al. (2019)	OIP	Ethical leadership	Ethical leadership (+) Organizational innovation	Knowledge sharing, empowerment, creativity		Knowledge sharing, empowerment
S11	Jung et al. (2008)	OIP	Transformational leadership	Transformational leadership (+) Organizational innovation	Idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and	High power distance (Taiwan) Competition	

No	Citation	Innovation type	Leadership type	Findings summary	Traits and behaviors that impact innovation	Other factors that impact innovation	Mediators
					individual consideration		
S12	Zhou & Wu (2018)	IWBs	Humble leadership	Humble leadership (+) Org. innovative behavior – individual	Employee CSE, open-mindedness, inclusivity, empowering	CSE and political skills	CSE and political skills
S13	Song et al. (2023)	IWBs	Ethical leadership, servant leadership	Servant leadership (+) low-innovative environments (+) IWBs Ethical leadership (+) high-innovative environments (+) IWBs		Organizational climate	Innovative environment (high or low)
S14	Akbari et al. (2020)	IWBs	Entrepreneurial leadership	Entrepreneurial leadership (+) IWBs (+) Org. innovative performance	Encouraging, empowering, autonomy, self-		

No	Citation	Innovation type	Leadership type	Findings summary	Traits and behaviors that impact innovation	Other factors that impact innovation	Mediators
					determination, creative self-efficacy		
S15	Pieterse et al. (2009)	IWBs	Transformational leadership, transactional leadership	Transformational leadership (+) high empowerment (+) IWBs Transactional leadership (-) IWBs	Empowerment, creative self-efficacy		Empowerment
S16	Zacher & Rosing (2015)	IWBs	Ambidextrous leadership, transformational leadership	Ambidextrous leadership (+) IWBs	Opening and closing behaviors: monitors and controls goal attainment, establishes routines and takes corrective action, controls adherence to rules, pays attention to uniform task accomplishment,		

No	Citation	Innovation type	Leadership type	Findings summary	Traits and behaviors that impact innovation	Other factors that impact innovation	Mediators
					sanctions errors, and sticks to plans.		
S17	Yang et al. (2023)	Technological innovation	Ambidextrous leadership, transformational leadership, transactional leadership	Ambidextrous leadership (+) Technological innovation	Employee psychological distance		Employee psychological distance
S18	Antonio et al. (2021)	IWBs	Servant leadership	Servant leadership (+) team climate, ambidexterity (+) IWBs	Ambidexterity	Team climate	Ambidexterity and team climate
S19	Berdecia-Cruz et al. (2022)	IWBs	Innovative mindset leadership, transactional leadership	Innovative mindset leadership (+) IWBs	Visionary leadership, risk taking, adaptability, empowerment, collaboration, customer-centricity,		

No	Citation	Innovation type	Leadership type	Findings summary	Traits and behaviors that impact innovation	Other factors that impact innovation	Mediators
					continuous learning, resilience		
S20	Rehman et al. (2019)	OIP	Transformational leadership, transactional leadership	Transformational leadership (+) org learning (+) Org innovative performance Transactional Leadership (+) Org Learning (+) Org Innov Performance		Organizational learning	Organizational learning
S21	Cui et al. (2022)	OIP	Transformational leadership, transactional leadership	Transformational leadership (+) org learning (+) Innovative performance Transactional leadership (+) org		Organizational learning	Organizational learning

No	Citation	Innovation type	Leadership type	Findings summary	Traits and behaviors that impact innovation	Other factors that impact innovation	Mediators
				learning (+) Innovative performance			
S22	Howell & Higgins (1990)	Technological innovation	Transformational leadership, entrepreneurial leadership	Transformational leadership (+) Technological innovation Entrepreneurial leadership (+) Technological innovation	Risk taking, influence, innovativeness		
S23	Howell & Avolio (1993)	OIP	Transformational leadership, transactional leadership	Transformational leadership (+) Organizational innovation Transactional leadership (-) Organizational innovation	Charisma, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation		
S24	Hughes et al. (2018)	OIP	Servant leadership	Servant leadership (+) Organizational innovation	Creativity		

No	Citation	Innovation type	Leadership type	Findings summary	Traits and behaviors that impact innovation	Other factors that impact innovation	Mediators
S25	Costa et al. (2023)	Product Process General	Transformational , transactional, autocratic, democratic	Transformational (+) Product, process innovation Transactional (-) General, product, process innovation Autocratic (-) General, product, process innovation Democratic (+) General innovation		Human capital	Human capital
S26	Liao et al. (2017)	OIP	Transformational , transactional	Leadership (+) org. learning (+) Org. innovation		Org. learning, industry type	Org. learning, industry type

No	Citation	Innovation type	Leadership type	Findings summary	Traits and behaviors that impact innovation	Other factors that impact innovation	Mediators
S27	Nguyen et al. (2023)	OIP	Transformational, transactional	Transformational (+) org innovation (+) Creativity Transactional (-) org. Innovation (-) Creativity		Creativity	Creativity
S28	Le (2020)	OIP	Transformational	Transformational (+) psychological human capital (+) Innovation	Self-efficacy, hope, optimism, resilience		
S29	Afsar & Umrani (2020)	IWBs	Transformational	Transformational (+) motivation to learn (+) Innovative behaviors		Innovation, climate, task complexity	
S30	Mai et al. (2022)	OIP		Core self-evaluation, narcissism, the need for achievement, and risk propensity (+) Innovation	Core self-evaluation, narcissism, the need for achievement, and risk propensity,	Knowledge acquisition, knowledge distribution, knowledge interpretation	Knowledge acquisition, knowledge distribution, knowledge interpretation

No	Citation	Innovation type	Leadership type	Findings summary	Traits and behaviors that impact innovation	Other factors that impact innovation	Mediators
S31	Y. Xie et al. (2018)	OIP	Transformational, transactional	Transformational (+) trust and individual identification (+) Org. innovative performance Transactional (+) trust (+) Org. innovative performance	Trust, individual identification		
S32	Łukowski (2017)	R&D, product, process, implementation	Transformational, transactional, charismatic, participative, interactive, instrumental			Goals – innovation type (People → means → effects → goals)	
S33	Li et al. (2018)	OIP	Transformational, transactional	Transformational (+) Org. innovation	Inspirational motivation, individualized consideration		

No	Citation	Innovation type	Leadership type	Findings summary	Traits and behaviors that impact innovation	Other factors that impact innovation	Mediators
S34	Kesting et al. (2016)	R&D, product, process, implementation	Transformational, transactional, charismatic, participative, interactive, instrumental			Goals – innovation type (People → means → effects → goals)	
S35	Sethibe & Steyn (2015)	OIP	Transformational, transactional	Transformational (+) Org. innovative performance Transactional (+) Org. culture = Org. innovative performance		Organizational learning	
S36	Odoardi et al. (2015)	IWB	Participative leadership	Participative leadership (+) IWB	Vision, empowerment, teamwork	Teamwork, information sharing	
S37	Burpitt & Bigoness (1997)	IWB	Empowering leaders	Empowering leader (+) Team innovation	Self-efficacy		

Conclusion

The extensive literature review on leadership constructs and their impact on organizational innovation reveals a multifaceted landscape where different leadership styles uniquely influence various innovation types. Leadership's role in promoting innovation is evident across several distinct styles, each contributing uniquely to the innovative capacities of organizations. Transformational leadership, frequently cited in the literature, relies heavily on the leader's ability to exert influence, motivate, and guide their followers towards innovative behaviors and outcomes, placing the onus on the leader to lead change effectively. This style is characterized by leaders who inspire and motivate their followers, challenging them to exceed their own limitations and think creatively. Studies such as those by Howell and Higgins (1990) and Hughes et al. (2018) highlight transformational leaders' ability to foster environments that nurture innovation through intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation.

Transactional leadership, while also influential, presents a more complex picture. Research has indicated that transactional leadership can positively impact OIP but primarily when an innovative culture is already high within the organization (Sethibe & Steyn, 2015). Trust is a critical moderator in this relationship; without high organizational trust, transactional leadership may be ineffective or even detrimental to innovation (Howell & Avolio, 1993; Y. Xie et al., 2018).

Ethical and ambidextrous leadership styles also prominently support the creation of innovative and ethical organizations. Ethical leaders emphasize open communication, fairness, and trust, creating an ethical climate conducive to innovation. Ambidextrous leaders, capable of effectively managing dual strategies of exploration and exploitation, are particularly effective in environments where technological innovation is critical.

Across the different leadership styles, several common traits and behaviors emerge as beneficial for fostering innovation. Empowerment and motivation are pivotal, encouraging employees to take initiative and engage in creative problem-solving. Ethical and inclusive practices ensure a work environment where diverse ideas can flourish without bias or barriers. Vision and risk taking are critical, providing a roadmap for innovation and inspiring team members to strive towards these new frontiers. Communication and trust are also commonly cited for their foundational impact on fostering an innovative culture. The instillment of creative self-efficacy among a leader's followers emerges as a common theme among innovative organizations.

In conclusion, the literature supports that no single leadership style is universally suitable for fostering innovation. Instead, an effective leadership profile for innovation must provide frontline support to the employees and integrate traits from various leadership styles to create a supportive, empowering, and ethically robust environment.

Leaders who prioritize their team's well-being and development emerge as the most capable of driving sustainable innovation. Despite the effectiveness of these leadership styles in driving innovation, they primarily position the leader as the central figure responsible for initiating and guiding change. This dynamic, while effective, underscores the importance of the leader's influence and ability to create conditions favorable for innovation. In contrast, servant leadership emerges as a unique style that places the followers above the leader and the organization itself. Servant leadership focuses on serving the needs of the followers, prioritizing their development, and fostering a supportive environment where innovation can thrive. Given its follower-centric approach, servant leadership deserves a closer examination as a model for fostering innovation.

Emergence of Servant Leadership. Servant leadership is suggested as a compelling framework for fostering innovation due to its alignment with key drivers of innovative behavior and employee-centric focus. Empirical evidence highlights those traits and behaviors inherent in servant leadership, even when not explicitly stated, closely intersect with those required to enhance an organization's innovative culture (Antonio et al., 2021; Hughes et al., 2018; Song et al., 2023; Waite, 2014).

A supportive and empowering environment is fundamental for innovation, and servant leadership naturally promotes such an environment by prioritizing employee growth and well-being. This focus on empowerment enables employees to take initiative and engage in creative problem-solving, essential for fostering innovation (Hughes et al., 2018). Ethical behavior and visionary leadership, central to servant leadership, also play a crucial role in driving innovation by inspiring trust and commitment among employees (Winston & Fields, 2015).

Trust and collaboration are critical for innovative outcomes, and servant leadership fosters a high level of both by valuing open communication and mutual respect within teams. This collaborative culture encourages the free flow of ideas and collective problem solving, leading to enhanced creativity and innovation (Hanif et al., 2020). Additionally, the focus on individual and collective growth, a hallmark of servant leadership, results in higher levels of innovative behavior and organizational commitment (Song et al., 2023).

Moreover, team ambidexterity, the ability to balance exploration and exploitation activities, is crucial for innovation, particularly in tech start-ups. Servant leadership supports this balance by encouraging a culture that values both creative exploration and efficient execution (Antonio et al., 2021). This alignment enhances the team's ability to innovate and adapt to changing environments.

In conclusion, the traits and behaviors that drive innovation – such as empowerment, ethical conduct, trust, collaboration, and a focus on growth – are inherently aligned with the principles of servant leadership. This intersection underscores the potential of servant leadership as an optimal framework for fostering a culture of continuous innovation and organizational success. Considering these findings, this study discusses servant leadership as a primary contender to fit the profile of a suitable leader for achieving innovation, due to its people-centric focus and emphasis on empowerment.

Defining Servant Leadership. Transformational leadership, the most frequently cited leadership style by researchers for its positive influence on innovation, shares a similarity with servant leadership in terms of empowerment of the individual. However, Stone et al. (2004) asserted the critical difference between transformational leadership and servant leadership lies in the key objective of the leader. For transformational leaders, the ultimate goal is to achieve organizational objectives and generate positive organizational outcomes, where the employee serves as a means to achieve that end. What Greenleaf (1977) suggested and Stone et al. reinforced was a leadership style that is contrary to the standard goal of organizational success, one that forsakes the organization as its focus and places it solely on the individual. Additionally, research has found servant leadership to be clearly distinct from transformational leadership in terms of social responsibility, follower needs, and its impact on positive employee performance (Parolini et al., 2009). Servant leaders distinguish themselves from other leadership styles as their focus is placed solely on the uplifting and service of their employees, with positive organizational outcomes as a secondary outcome.

Winston and Fields (2015) described how critics of servant leadership point to its difficulty in attributing the operational facet of servant leaders with positive outcomes. However, research is slowly proving that these positive outcomes come by way of servant leadership characteristics (Zubairu, 2020). Covey (1998) highlighted the method that distinguishes servant leadership in terms of influencing organizational outcomes: *“If you really want to get servant-leadership, then you’ve got to have institutionalization of the principles at an organizational level and foster trust through individual character and competence at the personal level”* (p. xvii). Based on Covey’s assertion, servant leaders primarily influence through the principles by which they embody.

Andersen (2009) suggested that servant leadership qualities may make a company more successful over the longer term and proposed this “bottom-up” style as more sustainable than traditional “top-down” styles of leadership. Servant leaders prioritize the needs of their team members, helping each individual to develop and excel in their roles. This leadership approach not only enhances individual employee performance but also cultivates a collaborative and innovative organizational culture. Empirical studies, such as those by Hughes et al. (2018), Antonio et al. (2021), and Song et al.

(2023), support the notion that servant leadership is linked positively with both OIP and creativity, suggesting that the servant leadership style fosters an environment where innovation is likely to flourish. Hanif et al (2020) found that servant leadership helps build trust among employees and their organization and lays the foundation for an innovative culture.

Williams et al. (2017) found empirical support for the positive influence of servant leaders on employee creativity by means of direct support, trust, and empowerment. Ehrhart (2004) suggested that values-driven leadership results in positive outcomes in employee commitment and organizational citizenship behavior. These behaviors come by way of the empathy, foresight, and organizational stewardship characteristics of the servant leader, which translates to employees who are more willing to put in extra effort toward their shared goals. Winston and Fields (2015) showed how these results lead to a more integrity-based, ethical, and adaptable organization. Not only do employees find greater satisfaction in their work, but their performance and increased organizational commitment results in an organization that thrives in uncertain environments (Ehrhart, 2004).

Given the alignment of servant leadership traits with those identified as crucial for driving innovation and the empirical evidence supporting its effectiveness, it is essential to further explore this leadership style as potentially optimal for fostering innovation. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- H₁: The profile of a servant leader – including their characteristics, traits, and/or behaviors – fits that of a leader who effectively drives innovation within organizations.

Methodology

To support H₁, this study reviews servant leadership literature to construct consensus and suggest a framework for a servant leadership constructs profile. Traits and behaviors uncovered during the literature review on leadership impact on innovation (summarized in Table 1) are measured against the servant leadership framework to identify overlap and alignment where empirical support exists for a particular servant leadership construct's positive impact on innovation. An exploration of H₁ is conducted by mapping the traits and behaviors with empirical support for their impact on innovation in Figure 1 to the matching servant leadership constructs in the proposed framework.

To effectively find alignment between servant leadership constructs and constructs of an innovative leader, it is necessary to identify an optimal servant leadership construct measure. Construct consensus is critical as a foundational framework for establishing grounded empirical support and sound empirical research methodology (Ploug &

Holm, 2015). Failing to reach a consensus on the constructs of a particular theory means that research findings and interpretations may suffer a lack of validity and reliability. Simply stated, construct consensus is the necessary foundation by which servant leadership researchers can uncover valid and reliable empirical data, build off existing theories, promote rigor in research, and reduce ambiguity in findings (Suddaby, 2014).

As Brown and Bryant (2016) displayed, construct consensus in the context of “the elephant” of servant leadership represents an obvious yet unspoken “elephant in the room” that researchers avoid addressing (p. 15). The landscape of constructs represents a wide range of conceptualizations that generate conceptual confusion (van Dierendonck, 2011). Brown and Bryant cited the work of Parris and Peachy (2013) who analyzed 39 studies to attempt to provide a cohesive narrative for how servant leadership works. The result was a flattened array of conceptual work in terms of characteristics, measurement development, and theoretical framework development. Scholars have continued to define and redefine servant leadership, further muddying the waters, while the preferred model depends on the opinion of the researcher (Brown & Bryant, 2016). Despite this assertion, attempts to sort through current research and establish a cohesive constructs framework for servant leadership are critical as to establish a baseline for further measurement.

Spears (1998) provided researchers with a conceptual framework for understanding servant leadership and offered 10 foundational constructs that make the theory accessible and actionable, providing a clear framework for servant leadership development. These 10 attributes include *listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community*. However, these constructs may oversimplify complex leadership dynamics and prove challenging to measure and implement effectively. To reinforce an effective construct model for servant leadership, it is necessary to support this framework with additional evidence and measures.

Winston and Fields (2015) analyzed seven dimensions of servant leadership based on varying servant leadership constructs proposed by Page and Wong (2000), Sendjaya and Sarros (2002), Dennis and Bocarnea (2005), Barbuto and Wheeler (2006), and Liden et al. (2008). Each construct proposal posited varying types of leadership characteristics including values, skills, behavior, and personality traits. Due to the numerous alternative operationalizations, Winston and Fields were, therefore, challenged to develop their own leadership construct model. Their efforts resulted in the aggregation of 10 leader behaviors that seem to be essential to servant leadership.

- practices what they preach
- serves people without regard to their nationality, gender, or race
- sees serving as a mission of responsibility to others

- genuinely interested in employees as people
- understands that serving others is most important
- willing to make sacrifices to help others
- seeks to instill trust rather than fear or insecurity
- is always honest
- is driven by a sense of higher calling
- promotes values that transcend self-interest and material success

Chaudhry et al. (2021) conducted a meta-analytic review of servant leadership literature with the goal of providing a cohesive definition of servant leadership. From 160 studies of servant leadership included in their analysis, they found that the plurality of interpretations and definitions have led to limited consensus on the characteristics of a servant leader, and a heavy reliance on Greenleaf's seminal work to conceptualize the construct (Chaudhry et al., 2021, p. 65). To measure servant leadership against positive employee perceptions and attitudes, the researchers narrowed down from 74 leader-centric characteristics and identified the attributes of *humility, authenticity, and interpersonal acceptance* to be uniquely distinct to servant leadership.

Langhof and Guldenberg (2020) conducted a systematic literature review focusing on servant leadership antecedents that began by recognizing that some scholars express criticism toward multidimensional constructs; specifically, van Knippenberg and Sitkin's (2013) criticism that a wide range of conceptualizations are often developed without empirical support for the chosen dimensions. Despite this, Langhof and Guldenberg concluded that the thoroughness regarding content and psychometry of Liden et al.'s (2008) seven-dimensions model makes it an appropriate multidimensional construct to capture servant leadership. Liden et al.'s servant leadership model consists of *conceptual skills, empowering, helping subordinates grow and succeed, putting subordinates first, behaving ethically, emotional healing, and creating value for the community*.

In their model of servant leadership, Van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011) delineated between primary aspects of leadership behavior and secondary aspects of leadership attributes. Primary aspects include *empowerment, accountability, standing back, humility, and stewardship*; while secondary attributes consist of *authenticity, courage, and forgiveness*. This model was based on the variance in results for secondary aspects and is explained that these might rely on follower perceptions of a successful leader (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011, p. 263). Similarly, Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) cited the differences in the relationships between self (leader) and rater (follower) reports of servant leadership and perceptions of organizational effectiveness raise issues related to the perceptions of leadership effectiveness (p. 32). Dimensions Barbuto and Wheeler uncovered include *altruistic calling, emotional healing, wisdom, persuasive mapping, and organizational stewardship*.

Russell and Stone (2002) set out to develop a practical model of servant leadership, categorizing its constructs based on existing empirical support. Core constructs include *vision, honesty, integrity, trust, service, modeling, pioneering, appreciation of others, and empowerment*. These outcomes are reinforced by eleven key attributes: *communication, credibility, competence, stewardship, visibility, influence, persuasion, listening, encouragement, teaching, and delegation*. Additionally, these results are mediated by various preexisting organizational characteristics such as values, culture, practices, and politics, alongside employee attitudes.

Patterson (2003) addressed the need for a theoretical model of servant leadership and established servant leadership as a virtues-based theory driven by virtuous constructs possessed by the servant leader. These constructs include *agapao love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service*.

Due to the diverse findings regarding servant leadership constructs, traits, and behaviors, it is necessary to combine servant leadership traits and behaviors into a single framework to effectively measure against innovative leadership findings. Based on the various traits, attributes, and behaviors brought forth by researchers, Table 2 represents a working model for servant leadership constructs.

Table 2

Servant Leadership Constructs Profile

Level	Trait/Attribute	Behavior and supporting constructs	Sources
I. Core self-concept and motivation	Stewardship	Practices stewardship; puts subordinates first; models behavior	Barbuto & Wheeler (2006); Liden et al. (2008); Russell & Stone (2002); Spears (1998)
	Empowerment	Empowering; helping subordinates grow and succeed	Langhof & Guldenberg (2020); Liden et al. (2008); Patterson (2003); Russell & Stone (2002); Spears (1998)
II. Foundational traits	Humility	Practices what they preach; demonstrates	Chaudhry et al. (2021); Patterson (2003); Spears

Level	Trait/Attribute	Behavior and supporting constructs	Sources
		humility and stewardship	(1998); Winston & Fields (2015)
	Authenticity	Is always honest; upholds integrity and trust	Chaudhry et al. (2021); Russell & Stone (2002); Spears (1998); Winston & Fields (2015)
	Interpersonal acceptance	Exhibits empathy, appreciation of others; Serves people without bias	Russell & Stone (2002); Spears (1998); Winston & Fields (2015)
III. Secondary Attributes	Vision	Promotes transcendent values; driven by a vision; demonstrates foresight	Patterson (2003); Russell & Stone (2002); Spears (1998); Winston & Fields (2015)
	Emotional healing	Provides emotional healing; advocates for community building	Barbuto & Wheeler; Liden et al. (2008); Spears (1998)
	Communication and encouragement	Exhibits strong communication, influence, and persuasion; encourages and teaches	Barbuto & Wheeler (2006); Russell & Stone (2002); van Dierendonck & Nuijten (2011)

Servant Leadership constructs in Table 2 were first grouped into the core self-concept and motivations of the servant leader (Level 1). Level 1 aligns with literature on the basis of a servant leader's motivation, as rooted in how they perceive themselves, or their *self-concept* (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). Sendjaya and Sarros (2002) used two distinct premises that drive who the servant leader is and what they do; the first premise being "I serve because I am the leader," and the second premise being "I am the leader because I serve" (p. 58). The second premise is rooted in a deep ambition to lead and be

at the top, while the second is rooted in altruistic stewardship and empowerment. In addition to being included as a core servant leadership construct, the development of a leader's self-concept as a servant may be enhanced by focusing on the characteristics of stewardship. Leaders who buy in to being accountable for the well-being of their followers possess the foundation necessary to move into servant leadership (Reinke, 2004; Spears, 1998). Leaders as stewards regard their followers as a "possession" that is entrusted to them to be elevated to their better potential (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002, p. 50). The constructs of communication, encouragement, and emotional healing are proposed as byproducts of the self-concept of stewardship, cascading from the desire to steward and empower the organization's followers.

The placement of *humility*, *authenticity*, and *interpersonal acceptance* as Level 2 core traits in servant leadership is deliberate and essential, serving as the bridge between foundational motivations and actionable behaviors. Humility, as Greenleaf (1977) noted, allows leaders to acknowledge their limitations and appreciate others' contributions, fostering a culture of trust and collaboration. Liden et al. (2008) contended authenticity involves leaders being true to themselves and maintaining honesty and transparency, creating environments of trust and integrity that encourage deep engagement from followers. Russell and Stone (2002) contended interpersonal acceptance entails understanding and accepting others without judgment, fostering a compassionate and empathetic leadership style. These traits are pivotal because they shape fundamental leader-follower interactions, ensuring that the motivations of stewardship and empowerment are grounded in trust-based relationships. Without these core traits, servant leadership would lack the relational foundation necessary for effective practice, making humility, authenticity, and interpersonal acceptance critical for bridging foundational motivations with practical leadership actions.

The Level 3 attributes – *vision*, *emotional healing*, *communication* and *encouragement* – can be defined as the "operationalization" of effective servant leadership. Vision enables the servant-leader to understand the lessons from the past, the realities of the present, and the likely consequences of a decision for the future (Spears, 1998). Servant leaders see a better future for their organization and their followers, and their goals flow seamlessly between the two (Reinke, 2004). Through emphasis on service and the ability to visualize a better future, servant leaders are well equipped to face any organizational challenges that await them. Emotional healing involves recognizing and addressing the emotional needs of followers and helping them overcome personal and professional challenges (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006). This attribute builds on the core trait of interpersonal acceptance, extending it to active support and care. Effective communication, the ability to listen actively and articulate ideas clearly, fosters open dialogue and trust (Russell & Stone, 2002). It is a natural extension of authenticity and humility, as it relies on the leader's genuine and transparent engagement with followers. While critical, these traits are a manifestation of the leader's foundational

commitment to serving the team and their capacity to build trust and authentic relationships.

Results

Using the proposed servant leadership framework (see Table 2), an analysis was conducted to map the qualities of an innovative leader (see Table 1) to the qualities of a servant leader. The first analysis approach involved coding each data entry from Table 1 so that each source (row) was assigned a unique code to facilitate precise mapping to findings in Table 2. These codes were systematically mapped to corresponding servant leadership constructs based on their relevance to specific traits and behaviors noted in the empirical findings. The mappings were documented comprehensively, appending empirical codes as footnotes in the original document to provide traceable evidence supporting each construct. Table 3 represents the output of the mapping exercise, with the “Sources” column notating the evidence from Table 1 supporting the constructs proposed in Table 2.

Table 3

Servant Leadership Constructs Profile (Mapped with Codes From Table 1)

Level	Trait/ Attribute	Behavior and supporting constructs	Literature review entries
I. Core self-concept and values	Stewardship	Practices stewardship; puts subordinates first; models behavior	S2
	Empowerment	Empowers; helps subordinates grow and succeed	S3, S4, S10, S12, S14, S15, S19, S36, S37
II. Foundational traits	Humility	Practices what they preach; demonstrates humility and stewardship	S12
	Authenticity	Is always honest; upholds integrity and trust	S1, S3, S4, S31

Level	Trait/Attribute	Behavior and supporting constructs	Literature review entries
III. Secondary attributes	Interpersonal acceptance	Exhibits empathy and appreciation of others; serves people without bias	S1, S12
	Vision	Promotes transcendent values; driven by a vision; demonstrates foresight	S2, S19, S36
	Emotional healing	Provides emotional healing; advocates for community building	S17, S18, S36
	Communication and encouragement	Exhibits strong communication, influence, and persuasion; encourages and teaches	S2, S4, S5, S9, S19

The result of our analysis finds empirical evidence supporting H_1 , though to varying degrees of significance. Constructs with the highest degree of support include the core value of *empowerment* (x9), attributes of *communication* and *encouragement* (x5), and foundational traits of *authenticity* (x4). Multiple layers of support are found for the attributes of *vision* (x3) and *emotional healing* (x3). Foundational traits of *interpersonal acceptance* (x2), *humility* (x1), and core self-concept of *stewardship* (x1) find some empirical support as well.

Amongst the total body of literature on the topic of leadership impact on innovation, there are 16 distinct studies that provide evidence supporting H_1 . Among these studies, the innovation type of IWB was highly significant with nine distinct studies finding support for H_1 , followed by technological innovation with four studies and OIP with three.

Discussion

The results highlighted in Table 3 represent a critical first step in exploring the impact of servant leadership on innovation, providing traceable evidence supporting the constructs as effective in achieving innovation. The findings of this study highlight the central role of *empowerment* in achieving organizational innovation. Research describes the role of empowerment in achieving innovation as one that seeks to utilize knowledge

sharing, political skills, social capital, and core self-evaluation to help the followers of an organization grow and succeed. This construct embodies the operationalization of a servant leader's core self-concept as a *steward* of the organization's followers.

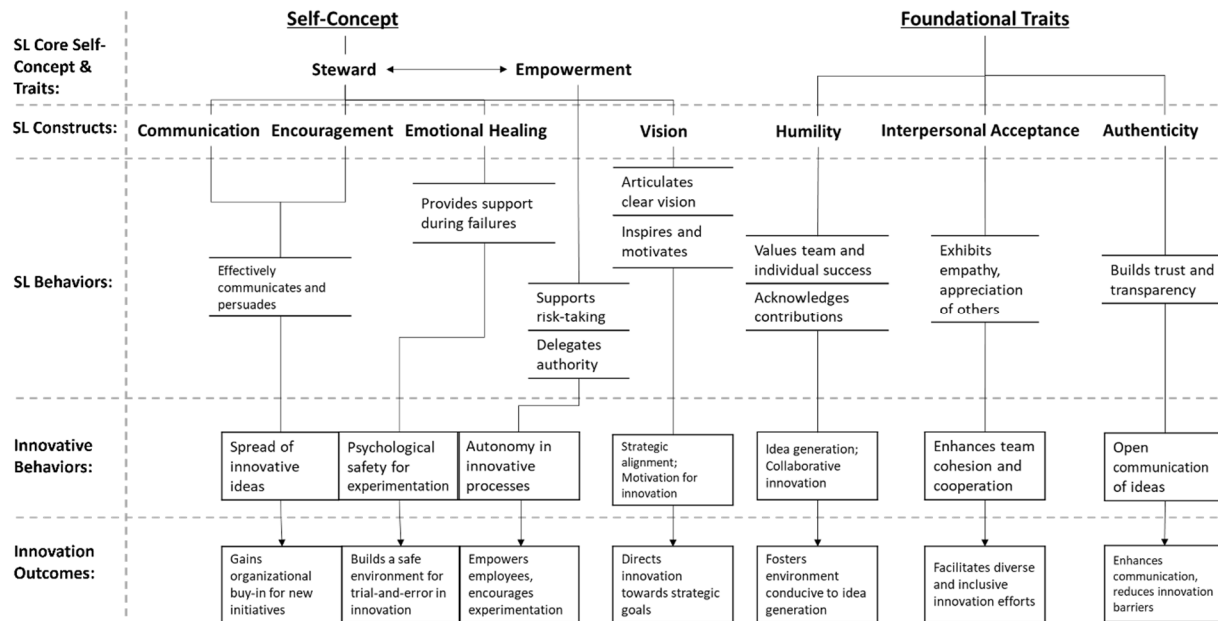
Communication and *authenticity* also find significance in their role in achieving organizational innovation. Effective communication ensures that ideas are shared, refined, and implemented efficiently. Authenticity, on the other hand, builds trust among followers. When leaders are genuine and transparent, they create a safe environment where employees feel valued and confident to share their ideas. Together, these constructs act as direct tools to help build an innovative culture within an organization. *Vision* is highlighted as playing a crucial role in achieving foresight and battling external factors and environmental headwinds. Visionary leaders provide direction and clarity, aligning the organization's efforts towards common innovative goals. *Emotional healing* is significant in the context of community building and teamwork. Leaders who provide emotional support and advocate for the well-being of their employees create a positive organizational climate. This supportive environment enhances collaboration and collective problem solving, which are vital for sustained innovation.

The innovation type most correlated with servant leadership is IWB. This result is unsurprising, given its employee-centric focus, aligning closely with the servant leader's emphasis on prioritizing employees first. IWB encompasses the actions of individuals or teams directed toward the initiation and application of new ideas, products, processes, or procedures in the workplace. Servant leaders, by nurturing and empowering their followers, create conditions conducive to IWB, thereby driving the overall innovative performance of the organization.

The findings from this study highlight the need for a comprehensive framework that maps these servant leadership constructs to specific innovative behaviors and outcomes. Such a framework would provide a structured approach to understanding how servant leadership traits and behaviors directly influence different types of innovation within organizations. Based on the mapping results from Table 3, Figure 1 represents a proposed theoretical framework that traces the servant leadership constructs to innovation outcomes.

Figure 1

Servant Leadership and Innovative Outcomes Framework



Conclusion

In the realm of organizational leadership, the prevailing discourse predominantly revolves around the actions leaders should take to foster innovation. Traditional leadership models, such as transformational and transactional leadership, emphasize the significance of leaders influencing their followers to drive organizational change and achieve innovation. These models focus on the tactical implementations and strategic decisions leaders must make to cultivate an innovative culture within their organizations. While these approaches highlight the importance of leader-driven change, they often place the onus on the leader to steer the organization toward innovative outcomes.

This article, however, takes a unique stance by shifting the focus from what leaders should do to who they should be. Instead of merely outlining the strategies and actions that leaders must undertake to spur innovation, this study delves into the intrinsic characteristics and traits that define an innovative leader. By concentrating on the dispositional attributes of leaders, the article seeks to uncover the fundamental qualities that inherently predispose leaders to foster innovation.

The literature review conducted within the article examines a diverse range of leadership styles, including transformational, transactional, ethical, ambidextrous, and entrepreneurial leadership. While these styles each contribute uniquely to fostering

innovation, they share a common thread: the emphasis on the leader's role in driving change and motivating followers. Transformational leadership, for instance, relies heavily on the leader's ability to inspire and intellectually stimulate their followers, while transactional leadership hinges on the leader's capacity to reward and manage followers' performance.

However, the article highlights that one leadership style, servant leadership, stands apart from the rest. Unlike other leadership models that prioritize organizational goals and use followers as means to achieve these ends, servant leadership places the followers' needs and development above all else. Servant leaders prioritize the growth, well-being, and empowerment of their followers, creating a supportive environment where innovation can naturally thrive. This follower-centric approach shifts the leadership paradigm from a top-down exercise of influence to a bottom-up approach where leaders exist primarily to serve and uplift their employees.

The empirical evidence presented in the article underscores the effectiveness of servant leadership in achieving positive innovation outcomes. By fostering a culture of trust, collaboration, and empowerment, servant leaders enable their followers to engage in creative problem-solving and innovative behaviors. This study uniquely contributes to the body of literature by proposing a framework that maps servant leadership constructs to specific innovative behaviors and outcomes, offering a structured approach to understanding how servant leadership traits and behaviors directly influence innovation.

In conclusion, this article is distinctive in its approach as it shifts the focus from the actions leaders must take to who they should inherently be. It posits that the essence of an innovative leader lies in their dispositional characteristics, and among the various leadership styles, servant leadership emerges as the most effective in placing followers' needs at the forefront. This people-centric leadership style deserves closer examination as a model for fostering sustainable innovation and organizational success.

Limitations and Future Research

The present study has a few notable limitations. First, this study is reliant on theoretical links supporting core servant leadership constructs and their positive influence on innovation. Future studies should focus on empirical evidence to support the theory proposed in H₁.

Additionally, the measurement framework used for servant leadership is unique to this study and has yet to be empirically tested. A review of the literature on servant leadership constructs reveals very little in terms of consensus. These findings suggest the need for researchers to reach a universally agreed-upon servant leadership framework as a basis for future empirical study. Developing more refined and

empirically validated measures of these constructs is essential for accurately assessing their direct and indirect effects on various types of organizational innovation. By focusing on these constructs, researchers can provide a clearer picture of how servant leadership influences innovation at different levels within an organization.

Researchers should also consider how servant leadership can be integrated with other leadership styles, such as transformational or transactional leadership, to maximize innovation outcomes. As highlighted by the emergence of ambidextrous leadership, hybrid models that combine elements of different leadership styles may offer a more nuanced understanding of how various traits and behaviors interact to foster innovation. Such models can provide practical insights into developing comprehensive leadership frameworks that leverage the strengths of multiple leadership approaches.

The organizational context and environmental factors also play a crucial role in moderating the relationship between servant leadership and innovation. Researchers should study how factors such as industry type, organizational size, and market dynamics influence this relationship. Understanding these moderating factors can help tailor leadership development programs to meet the specific needs of different organizations, enhancing the overall effectiveness of servant leadership in promoting innovation. Future research should seek to flesh out the framework by including notable external variables that impact innovation such as environmental dynamism, organizational learning, and cultural preferences for power distance (Cui et al., 2022; Hou et al., 2019; Iqbal et al., 2021; Rehman et al., 2019).

Practical Implications

The ability of organizations to innovate is crucial to stay competitive and adaptable in our fast-paced environment. The classical framework for achieving innovations in an organization typically places the onus of innovation on the organization's top leadership, while the rest of the organization follows in their footsteps. This model is inconsistent with research, however, which highlights the primary role of leadership in innovative processes is to mold and cultivate the organization's innovative culture and empowerment of the employees of the organization. Servant leadership emerges as a primary contender to fit the model of an innovative leader due to its distinct focus on supporting followers above all else. The intersection of servant leadership and innovation reveals a transformative approach to organizational success, challenging traditional leadership paradigms and redefining the pathways to achieving sustainable competitive advantage.

This study illuminates the profound impact that servant leaders, through their unique blend of humility, authenticity, stewardship, visionary leadership, interpersonal acceptance, emotional healing, communication, and empowerment can have on fostering an environment ripe for innovation. As organizations navigate the

complexities of a rapidly changing business landscape, the emphasis on servant leadership offers a compelling narrative: that true innovation flourishes not under the command of an influential leader but through the nurturing and empowerment of individuals.

Spears (1998) described the most common misconception when introducing the concept of servant leadership as the idea that managers will end up working for their followers, who end up making all decisions and acting as the organization's guide, and lead into a situation where the "inmates were running the prison" (p. 22). Spears cleared up this misconception by establishing that good leadership is a visionary role that seeks to provide direction. Leaders who are called to serve will seek to activate and enhance their followers' abilities and are gratified by seeing them win and grow (Patterson, 2003). In this structure, the leader provides direction through service and moves employees toward accomplishing their own goals. Ehrhart (2004) provided a metaphor of a rowboat to illustrate this radical approach to providing organizational direction. The person who sets the pace and guides the direction of the boat sits at the back. In the context of servant leadership, a commitment to a shared vision propels the organization forward, as opposed to strict enforcement from the front.

By prioritizing the growth and well-being of employees, servant leaders create a culture of trust, openness, and creativity, essential ingredients for continuous innovation. This people-centric approach not only drives individual and collective performance but also aligns organizational goals with ethical and sustainable practices, ensuring long-term success (Winston & Fields, 2015). As the empirical evidence continues to support the efficacy of servant leadership in promoting innovation, it becomes increasingly clear that the future of leadership lies in the hands of those who serve.

About the Author

Landon Meriweather is 29 years old and resides in Fayetteville, AR. He has worked as a digital marketing analyst at Tyson Foods and Acxiom. He completed the Master of Arts in Organizational Leadership with a focus on servant leadership in July 2024. His interest in servant leadership is rooted in a desire to challenge corporate norms, where soft skills and character development are often overlooked. His career and scholastic interests are focused on uncovering the source of effective change, focusing on who a person is and should be, rather than simply what they should do.

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