

# Spiritual leadership within the ambit of African Management philosophies using interactive qualitative analysis



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**Orientation:** This research is about a focus group of managers and their experiences relating to spiritual leadership in the South African context.

**Research purpose:** To critically examine mainstream spiritual leadership, within the context of African management philosophies (AMP), towards describing and prosing a southern African spiritual leadership scale.

**Motivation for the study:** A systematic literature review revealed a stark gap in empirical evidence of the existence of spiritual leadership as a harbinger of employee contentment, welfare, and organisational success in Africa.

**Research design, approach and method:** Through the interactive qualitative analysis (IQA) process, data from eight managers were collected and analysed, and an interrogation of the existence of spiritual leadership via the African lens using AMP typologies was conducted. An exploratory qualitative study was conducted via a focus group of eight managers drawn using biased sampling based on 'distance and power' analysis to the phenomena of spiritual leadership.

**Main findings:** Connection to nature principles (nurturing) are a primary driver to employee welfare. Life as a universal current's elements (compassion and empathy) influence Ubuntu principles, national culture principles (a set of behaviours, customs, and beliefs) and Indigenous knowledge systems (unadulterated knowledge). Ubuntu also influences co-operative teamwork (togetherness) which is a circulator in the scale that triggers intrinsic motivation which is impacted by traditionalism (adherence to accepted customs and beliefs), and communalism principles (belonging to a community). Intrinsic motivation impacts employee turnover which is influenced by engagement, performance, productivity, and mythology (African myths and lore). Employee turnover ultimately influences employee welfare which is a primary outcome.

**Contribution or value add:** This research helps undergird spiritual leadership in the South African context by equipping leaders with a new paradigm that uses local management principles that measures its enablers and inhibitors.

**Keywords:** Leadership; spiritual leadership; scale development; interactive qualitative analysis; African management philosophies.

## Introduction

Spiritual leadership (SL) has been chosen for this research because it has not gained traction in terms of its academic potency compared with other classical leadership theories like transactional leadership, transformational leadership, autocratic leadership and bureaucratic leadership, even though it has a good deal of anecdotal appeal. The theory of SL therefore offers a wide range of alternatives, as it can be seen as a pathway to bridge a gap between classical leadership theories and contextualised principles. It offers a link between stochastic classical leadership theories and localised management principles, a link that is seldom available in the extant literature, as will be evidenced below.

The theory of SL has been gaining currency in the sphere of academia over the last decade. A myriad of studies pertaining to the theory have been conducted in the United States of America (USA) and in Europe. This has led to hasty conclusions that 'leadership is leadership' anywhere. This conclusion is perilous in that it negates the very context in which leaders carry out their mandates and duties. Context is seen as a major contributor to the values, attitudes and behaviours

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that leaders exhibit (Jepson 2009). As contexts are by no means homogeneous, so are the values, attitudes and behaviours of leaders (Bush 2018). By the same token, the spiritual inclinations of the leaders differ from one context to another (Hamilton & Bean 2005). In this vein, the South African context of SL will thus be different when compared with the USA context. As the world has been bedevilled by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, workplace leadership responses to this malaise cannot be the same. The responses in the workplace for leaders can thus not be uniform. Solutions that are tailor made for the local context must be brought to the fore in order to strengthen employee welfare (Rao, Sekhar & Raghunath 2015). It is with this in mind that a localised and/or contextualised theory of SL is sought.

To put it in perspective, the review of SL, as will be shown below, is in the workplace context and a secular one. It exists without proselytising or pressurising the employees (Reave 2005). The nonsecular aspects, as many authors (Phipps 2012; Sendjaya 2007; Thompson 2004) have revealed, albeit divisive, might also lead to a whole different discussion, as religious and spiritual affairs are deemed to have no place in the workplace (Duchon & Ashmos 2005). This is largely because of the nature of the myriad of religions that employees might have. To avoid being prejudiced and biased at the same time, it is thus incumbent upon one to look at the secular aspects of SL such as values, attitudes and behaviours that intrinsically motivate others to perform in a nonmechanistic way. Much as the theory of SL sounds abstract and somewhat agnostic, it is argued that to bring currency to it, it must be grounded and undergirded in local thinking. This local thinking is presented in the form of African management philosophies (AMP) (Bhengu 2014). These philosophies aver that the African perspective or lens is vital when looking at any leadership or management thinking (Anyansi-Archibong 2001). It argues that any leadership or management theory must consider the African local realities (Edoho 2001). As poignant as this might sound, without any empirical evidence to back this up, the claim is somewhat superfluous.

## Research purpose

There have been several studies that have been conducted relating to the theory of SL, particularly by Fry (2003), who has been upheld as the seminal author (Markow & Klenke 2005). These studies have been predominantly USA focused. Very few studies have been done in Africa, as revealed by the systematic literature review conducted by the authors. This research gap spurred the authors to look at the efficacy and effectiveness of this theory to Africa in general and South Africa in particular. The purpose of the study was therefore to: (1) examine the empirical existence of the effectiveness of such a theory on employee welfare, (2) sync the theory with existing local thinking in AMP and (3) to analyse whether such a theory has potency in helping to stimulate debate around the issue of contextualising some of the Western

leadership thinking and thus adding new knowledge to existing leadership thinking. The research is meant to find out whether there are SL elements that exist in South Africa that are poised to be radically different from the Western stance of what the theory posits.

## Literature review

The syncing of SL and AMP elements was by no means an academic exercise. It was but an attempt to find out whether the unnuanced relationship between the two carries any empirical weight in the South African context. As will be shown below, the literature review was conducted to conform to the general body of scientific knowledge framework. According to Babbie and Mouton (2011), research should be situated within the general body of scientific knowledge framework (Solomon & Steyn 2017). Scientific knowledge is collective and demands rigor and thoroughness. The building blocks of science, according to De Vos et al. (2013), usually include concepts, definitions and typologies (elements). The literature review of SL and AMP in this article will focus on these three building blocks of the general body of scientific knowledge.

## Spiritual leadership

Definitions, concepts and elements typical of SL are presented below.

### Definitions of spiritual leadership

Spiritual leadership is defined by Fry (2003:694) as the 'values, attitudes, and behaviours that are necessary to intrinsically motivate self and others so that they have a sense of spiritual survival (through calling and membership)'. Fairholm (1996) states that SL is about creating an environment where followers can function freely with the leader, albeit subject to certain accountability parameters. Korac-Kakabadse, Kouzmin and Kakabadse (2002) view a spiritual leader as someone who guides others using spiritual values. Values such as integrity, honesty and humility make spiritual leaders 'relied upon, trusted, and admired' (Reave 2005, pp. 663). Spiritual leadership has also been defined as incorporating and bolstering meaningfulness in organisations through calling and membership among subordinates (Duchon & Ashmos 2005). It is also defined as harnessing others' energies towards the fulfilment of ideological goals, and thus 'spiritual leaders not only help ethical evolution but also guarantees collective attempts to realize social reforms' (Noor et al. 2017, pp.1432). Spiritual leadership is defined as well as a conscious effort to balance work and personal lives of individuals (Pawar 2014). A spiritual leader therefore fosters self-awareness, self-growth and self-leadership among followers and sees them as 'whole persons' with a myriad of skills that go beyond the realms of their job (Fairholm & Gronau 2015; Nguyen et al. 2018). Individual ego-transcendence has been linked to the definition of SL in the workplace (Parameshwar 2005). Employees in this vein are constantly emboldened to strive to

connect with a 'higher force' and desire to integrate themselves into a meaningful whole and thus ultimately realise their potential (Phipps 2012:107). Notwithstanding the foregoing, Chen and Yang (2012:107) have defined SL as referring to 'employees living their values more fully at the workplace and organizations paying more attention to supporting employees' spiritual growth'.

The definition of Fry (2003), who is commonly seen as the seminal author in this field (Ferguson & Milliman 2008; Markow & Klenke 2005), is used by many authors (55% of the 58 articles retrieved on SL) as a foundation for their research. Only 19% of the found articles did not have any definitions of SL. Twenty one per cent of the articles found had definitions of SL. The remainder 5% is spread among the three different authors who had extended the definitions of Fry (2003) and Reave (2005), respectively.

### Concept of spiritual leadership

An understanding of the concept of SL necessitates an understanding of the antecedents of the construct. The systematic literature review conducted on SL showed that of the 58 articles that met the inclusion criteria, 56 of them had inner life as an antecedent, and two articles had social order or Confucianism as an antecedent. The inclusion criteria and the coding of the articles looked at the synonyms that relate to the concept of SL and those that distinguish them from it. Inner life, Confucianism, altruism, trust and other antecedents were looked at.

### Elements of spiritual leadership

According to Sendjaya (2007), there are four elements of SL, viz: religiousness, interconnectedness, sense of mission and wholeness. An understanding of the elements of SL is informed by an understanding of the moderators and mediators of SL. The literature review on SL revealed that of the 58 articles, 44 (76%) had culture as a moderator, 4 (7%) had emotional intelligence, 1 (2%) perceived organisational support, 6 (10%) psychological ownership, 2 (3%) had Confucianism and 'other' had 1 (2%). In terms of mediators, the 58 articles retrieved 4 (7%) looked at Confucian mindset, 2 (3%) at creative process mindset, 1 (2%) at environmental passion, 26 (45%) at intrinsic motivation, 14 (24%) at workplace spirituality, 2 (3%) at professional ethics, 6 (10%) at self-esteem and 3 (5%) at 'other'.

### African management philosophies

Definitions, concepts and elements typical of AMP are presented below.

#### Definitions of African management philosophies

The systematic literature review conducted on AMP retrieved 22 relevant articles. African management philosophies are defined as a different paradigm of viewing leadership in organisations through the African lens (Asante 2007; Edoho 2001; Gumede 2017; Seny Kan, Apitsa & Adegbite 2015; Van

den Huevel 2008). Bhengu (2014) has stated that AMP represent an African worldview that hails traditionalism, communalism, cooperative teamwork and mythology. It also looks at the concept of *ubuntu* – which in South Africa is an isiZulu maxim that states that *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*. Translated to English, it means 'I am because we are'. This depicts the collective conscience of the human spirit. Individualistic behaviour in African societies is not supported and not part of the African aphorism. Rather, community, cooperative teamwork, symbols and mythologies are elements that undergird AMP (Nkomo 2006). Nkomo (2006:10) defines AMP as an attempt 'to look to the history of Africa and the presence of indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) that resulted in effective management during the pre-colonial era'. It is perhaps Edoho (2001) who captures the definition of AMP succinctly by stating that it refers to the:

[P]ractical way of thinking about how to effectively run organizations – be they in the public or private sectors – on the basis of African ideas and in terms of how social and economic life is actually experienced in these regions. (p. 74)

Van den Huevel (2008:41) concurs by stating that AMP is an attempt to revise 'dominant management thinking and promote "humane-ness" and participatory decision making in South African organisations, in search of a contextualized management approach'.

#### Concepts of African management philosophies

An understanding of the concept of AMP necessitates an understanding of the antecedents of the construct. As depicted in the literature review sought, AMP presents a diverse collection of concepts, which are not easily combatable; hence, the antecedents from the 22 articles sought were varied. The literature review revealed that a large array of concepts may be included when discussing this construct (22 of the articles found had different antecedents). These include *ubuntu* (Mangaliso 2001), IKS (Nkomo 2006), national culture (Nkomo 2011) and attuned leadership (Khoza 2012). The concepts of AMP, according to Goldman (2013), are founded on the principle of *ubuntu*. This is an African worldview that is seen as a 'pervasive spirit of caring and community, harmony and hospitality, respect, and responsiveness, that individuals and groups display for one another' (Kastern & Illa 2005:607).

The literature review found out that the array of concepts makes defining AMP particularly difficult because they are diverse, sparse and not developed into a formalised theory. This therefore hampers building a coherent body of knowledge on the topic (Anyansi-Archibong 2001).

#### Elements of African management philosophies

The definitions provided above inform the characteristics of AMP. An understanding of the moderators and mediators of the construct is crucial to understand the elements of AMP. All the 22 articles sought had culture as a moderator of AMP. For the 22 articles on AMP retrieved, there were different and varied moderators.

## Research methods and design

### Research approach

In this research, a case study approach was adopted using interactive qualitative analysis (IQA). According to Northcutt and McCoy (2004), IQA is a methodology that is qualitative in nature that focuses on attempting to provide a systematic, rigorous and accountable framework for qualitative enquiry (Cook & Geldenhuys 2018). This research approach was seen to be suitable for this research because of its social constructivism approach. Social constructivism (Bargate 2014) is a paradigm that seeks to examine how phenomena are socially constructed. Interactive qualitative analysis was seen to be appealing to researchers if they wished to develop theory that demonstrates a systematic understanding of the phenomenon (Northcutt & McCoy 2004). Research participants in IQA are independent from the researcher. They are free to generate, collect and analyse their own data, unencumbered by the influence of the researcher. They do this using their own lived experiences about the phenomena. The researcher plays a role of a facilitator rather than a participant (Jan 2018).

### Research strategy

The research strategy employed in this research was a focus group. According to Du Preez and Stiglingh (2018:146), a focus group 'is a group interview with the fundamental purpose of listening to and learning from the group members'. The ultimate objective is to enhance the overall comprehension of a construct. During the focus group, the researcher listens to the participants and learns from them; in the process, the group participants generate new ideas among themselves and with the researcher (De Vos et al. 2013). Even though each participant might have their own ideas about the construct, a whole new set of ideas emerges through the interaction because of the different lived experiences of the participants (Babbie & Mouton 2011).

### Setting

The research was conducted online on Microsoft Teams (Microsoft Corporation, Redmond, Washington, United States). This is a software used for workspace real-time collaboration, conferencing, communication and meetings. Like any other software, it has its pros and cons. The advantages include, among others, its increased focus on work, productivity and easy implementation. The disadvantages include, among others, confusing file structures, different online meeting experience and limited flexibility. Because of the pros that outweigh the cons, this was the chosen application for study, as South Africa was still under COVID-19 Level 3 lockdown restrictions. This was the preferred method of interaction given the limitations imposed by the pandemic.

### Study population and sampling strategy

A convenient sampling technique was employed to select the participants of the focus group. Northcutt and McCoy's (2004)

'power-distance' analysis was used to select participants conveniently. The participants were chosen because they shared a common understanding of the phenomenon (*distance*), and they equally had previous leadership experience (*power*) and thus were a representative sample of the leaders who understood the phenomenon of SL as it pertains to the South African context. A total of eight participants agreed to partake in the focus group, six women and two men. There were two caucasian participants and six black African participants. The participants were all managers in their respective workplaces. They were evenly split in terms of age as well.

### Data collection

Data were collected using the first phase of the IQA process (Northcutt & McCoy 2004). The participants' experiences in leading organisations through SL were probed at this stage of the process, using silent brainstorming for data generation. The participants were asked to silently reflect on their experiences by means of a statement that was issued by the researcher. The following issue statement was used – 'From your own perspective, what is spiritual leadership and what are its effects on employee welfare?' In this case, this issue statement was used to 'deconstruct and operationalize the research question' (Mampane & Bouwer 2011:117). The silent reflection was for about 10 min. The participants were then later asked to write their reflections about their experiences of SL on the group chat on Microsoft Teams. There were no restrictions to the number of reflections, but participants were encouraged to use only one word, thought or reflection per response posted.

### Affinity analysis

The participants were asked to read their reflections silently, as posted on the chat line. The data generated were then read out aloud by the researcher for the understanding of all participants and to eliminate any confusion. This was the *clarification* stage (Bargate 2014; Northcutt & McCoy 2004).

### Data analysis

#### Inductive coding

When the clarification stage was complete, the participants were urged to identify themes (affinities) within their many responses. The participants were encouraged to arrange the affinities posted on the group chat on Microsoft Teams in order of common meanings. This was done in silence to discourage dominant individuals from monopolising the process. The genesis of this process was to enable the yielding of a collective view in terms of items with common affinities. This stage is called the *clustering* stage.

#### Axial coding

The participants were encouraged to rearrange the 36 affinities according to their respective and/or common groups to ensure that they fell under the correct AMP element. The

participants were encouraged to place each affinity into a certain bucket relating to the AMP thematic group. See Table 1 of the result of the affinity groupings and the results obtained from the grouping process.

### Detailed affinity relationship table

The participants were encouraged to complete the affinity relationship table (ART) by recording an analysis of each pair of affinity relationships. Northcutt and McCoy (2004) state that respondents at this stage will be asked to write a hypothesis 'that reflects their experiences and that supports the cause-and-effect relationship' between affinity pairs. A short 'if-then' statement might suffice. Human-Vogel (2006:619) states that at this juncture the responses will be taken as the true meaning of how participants 'conceptualized the relationship' – in this case SL versus AMP. In the interest of time, the ART was completed at the group level. For purposes of this research, the ART was analysed at the group level to determine the group's understanding of common affinities relating to SL via the AMP lens (Human-Vogel & Mahlangu 2009).

At this stage, a Pareto analysis was employed, and this is based on the principle that 'a minority of the relationships in any system will account for a majority of the variation in the system' (Northcutt & McCoy 2004:157). The 80–20 Pareto principle state that 80% of the effects come from 20% of the causes. The best number of affinities will be at a level where *power* reaches a summit. Using the ARTs derived, each relationship frequency was added and put on a spreadsheet, and aggregate votes for each relationship were calculated. To establish which affinities are to be included or excluded from the composite group interrelationship diagram (IRD), the last two columns of the Pareto table are used in determining where to set the dividing point, as relationships are shown in decreasing order of frequency. As per Figure 1, the data retrieved show that the power is at a maximum at 49.34509 where the

**TABLE 1:** Final affinity group per African management philosophy element.

Affinity grouping	Affinity grouped per AMP element
1 Ubuntu	Kindness, humility, courtesy, respect, altruistic love, integrity
2 National culture	Self-awareness, passion or diligence, vision, self-drive
3 Indigenous knowledge systems	Backbone or decisiveness
4 Life as a universal current	Compassion, empathy, trust
5 Connection to nature	Nurturing, authentic
6 Traditionalism	Ethics, responsibility, credibility, accountability
7 Communalism	Transparent or honest, corrective
8 Cooperative teamwork	Efficiency, communication, recognition or reward, participation, teamwork
9 Mythology	Creativity
10 Intrinsic motivation	-
11 Engagement	-
12 Performance	-
13 Employee turnover	-
14 Employee welfare	-
15 Productivity	-

AMP, African management philosophies.

cumulative frequency is at 96.5%, which is the apex in Figure 1 graph.

At this level, affinity relationships are mapped to create the composite IRD. The arrow's direction in each affinity pairing (see Table 2) depicts which affinity is influenced by which causality. Arrows facing up show the row driving the column, and those facing left show the column driving the row. The IRD operates based on an accounting concept of double entry, as each affinity will have a corresponding similar entry in the tabular IRD, and the 'ins' and 'outs' need to balance with the number of affinity relationship pairs. The IRD will thus provide which affinities in the AMP are drivers or outcomes. Positive deltas are drivers while negative deltas are outcomes or effects.

### Cluttered systems influence diagram

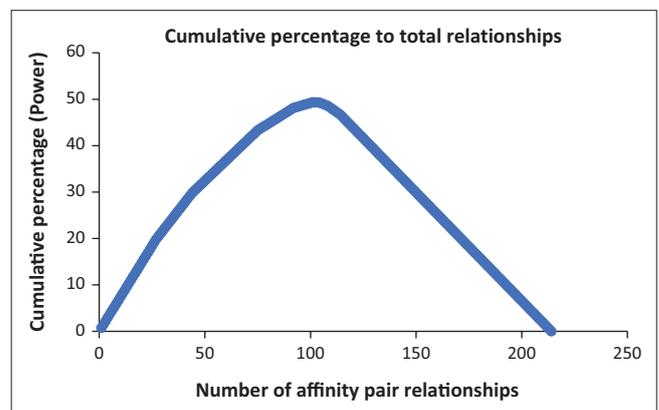
According to Northcutt and McCoy (2004:174), the systems influence diagram (SID) is a visual representation of all relationships of the entire system. When sketching the SID, primary drivers are plotted on the extreme left-hand side and the primary outcomes on the extreme right-hand side (Bargate 2014). Secondary drivers and outcomes are slotted between primary drivers and outcomes. Drivers are placed on the left and outcomes on the right. Each relationship in the IRD is represented by an arrow which is drawn between the two affinities showing the direction of cause and effect, the result being the *cluttered SID*. This cluttered SID is normally too complex for any meaning to be attached to it and thus needs to be uncluttered for it to make sense.

### Uncluttered systems influence diagram

At this stage, the relationships are thoroughly examined, and all nonessential links are removed to simplify the diagram. This exercise results in the uncluttering of the SID, as per Figure 2.

### A tour through the system

At this stage, an analysis of the whole SID is needed to offer a meaningful interpretation of the interrelationships between the affinities. There is a feedback loop that arises because of the analysis performed by looking at the whole SID.



Note: Creating a group composite: the interrelationship diagram (IRD).

**FIGURE 1:** Graphical representation of affinity pair relationships.

TABLE 2: Tabular interrelationship diagram.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	OUT↑	IN←	Δ
1	-	←	←	←	←	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	10	4	6
2	↑	-	↑	←	←	↑	←	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	11	3	8
3	↑	←	-	←	←	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	11	3	8
4	↑	↑	↑	-	←	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	13	1	12
5	↑	↑	↑	↑	-	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	14	0	14
6	←	←	←	←	←	-	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	10	4	6
7	←	↑	←	←	←	←	-	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	9	5	4
8	←	←	←	←	←	←	←	-	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	7	7	0
9	←	←	←	←	←	←	←	←	-	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	6	8	-2
10	←	←	←	←	←	←	←	←	←	-	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	5	9	-4
11	←	←	←	←	←	←	←	←	←	←	-	↑	↑	↑	↑	4	10	-6
12	←	←	←	←	←	←	←	←	←	←	←	-	↑	-	←	1	12	-11
13	←	←	←	←	←	←	←	←	←	←	←	←	-	↑	←	1	13	-12
14	←	←	←	←	←	←	←	←	←	←	←	←	←	-	←	0	13	-13
15	←	←	←	←	←	←	←	←	←	←	←	←	←	←	-	3	11	-8

Note: Focus group systems influence diagram (SID).

Δ, delta sign signifying change

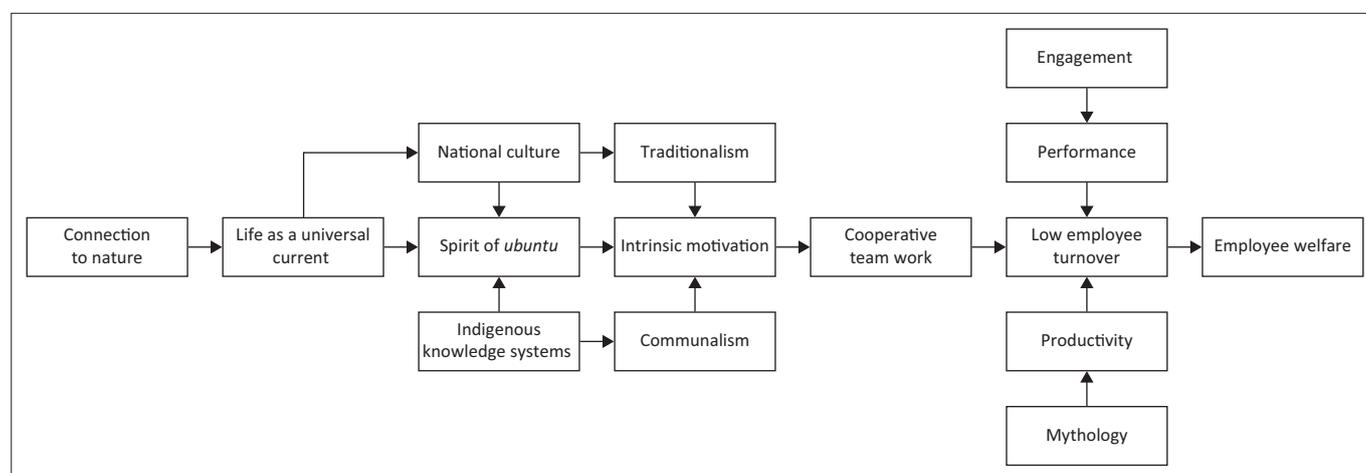


FIGURE 2: Uncluttered systems influence diagram.

This is representative of the interactive nature between the elements.

### Feedback loops and zooming

As mentioned in the preceding step, the analysis of the SID will reveal some feedback loops. The total number of loops is identified. Northcutt and McCoy (2004:335) state that a feedback loop consists of 'at least three affinities, each influencing the other directly or indirectly'. The feedback loops, according to Bargate (2014:17), can be 'renamed by reviewing the components of each subsystem'. The process is referred to as 'zooming' by Northcutt and McCoy (2004:335). Axial coding and associated descriptions are used to place feedback loops within the whole system, and thus a substitute name for subsystems is generated. After the feedback loop and zooming process, the final SID was as depicted in Figure 2.

### Ethical considerations

All protocols relating to ethical clearance were observed and sought. Ethical clearance for the IQA process was sought from the University of South Africa. The researchers did abide by the guidelines as stipulated by the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA).

The University of South Africa's 'Policy on research ethics' was adhered to. Ethical clearance number: 2020\_SBL\_AC\_015\_FA.

## Results

### Results relating to the focus group

The IQA process generated 36 affinities, which were further grouped into 15 affinities through an axial coding process that used AMP thematic groups (see Table 1). These affinities were used to come up with a new construct of leadership in a South African context. Affinities are assigned their different related positions within the system via arranging them in a descending manner of their respective deltas and ultimately generating in the process the drivers (causes) and outcomes (effects) within the system. This systematic process has an audit trail of the whole system and results in a visual presentation of the data (SID). This visual presentation (Figure 2) of the data is a representation of the theory generated by the focus group.

### Primary driver: Connection to nature

The generated SID as per Figure 2 shows that the AMP element of *connection to nature* is a primary driver of

employee welfare, as per the focus group experience. Nkomo (2006) avers that one of the primary tasks of leaders is to:

[E]stablish harmony with their community and environment; vertically organized moral order and human relations is generally not characterized by the development of technical skills but the gradual adoption of a philosophy of universal fellowship. (p. 14)

If a spiritual leader is to be able to encourage positive employee welfare, the individual must be nurturing. As per the definition generated by the group, nurturing means to care for and protect someone in their trajectory of growth. This was found to be the primary driver in the process, which may be because of the motherly instincts of the participants (75% female) in the focus group. If a leader is nurturing and authentic, the individual can take care of the needs of the employees irrespective of their background, colour or creed.

As an element of AMP, *connection to nature* is of utmost importance as it speaks to the issue of human transcendence (Oppong 2013). Caring about the physical planet and taking care of it speaks of sustenance and the issues of climate change that have dogged the world today (Patz et al. 2014). These are seen to be the fulcrum of the future survival of humanity. If transposed to the working environment, an organisation cannot survive if it does not take care of and nurture its employees. A leader who embraces *connection to nature* principles is a leader who cares for employees and the survival of the organisation. The individual is not only worried about the here and now but is also equally concerned about the future. To be prepared for the future, one must plan for it now. Nurturing principles are therefore fundamental to SL within the South African context. Spiritual leaders therefore understand the cosmic connection of people to nature and thus embrace this element as a cornerstone for survival, just like the symbiosis that generally exists between a mother and her infant.

## Secondary drivers: Life as a universal current, national culture, indigenous knowledge systems, spirit of ubuntu, traditionalism and communalism

### Life as a universal current

*Life as a universal current* was seen from the SID (Figure 2 above) to be caused by *connection to nature*. As Nkomo (2011) has stated, *connection to nature* speaks to the idea of universal fellowship. If a leader is nurturing in their behaviour and attitude, then the leader exudes a cosmic connection to their followers. This therefore means that the leader recognises their 'position in the never-ending cycle while helping others to identify theirs – life is greater than individuals and groups' (Oppong 2013:47). This important element therefore means, in an organisational context, that spiritual leaders are not only obsessed about tasks but are also keenly aware of the human element that goes hand in hand with the completion of the tasks. They are concerned about the well-being and welfare of their employees.

They regard the total person as ever crucial in achieving tasks, and that person interacts with others in the cycle of life, and that interaction has a bearing on the tasks the individual must complete and thus their welfare. A positive fellowship between the leader and the follower is crucial in rendering the process of task achievement necessary.

### National culture

This is defined by Nkomo (2011) as an AMP element that refers to a set of behaviours, norms, customs and beliefs in a sovereign nation's population. The focus group identified that South Africa as a 'rainbow nation' embraces different cultures and beliefs, but central to national values are principles of diligence, self-awareness, self-drive and vision. This element of national culture, as per above SID (see Figure 2 above) is driven by *life as a universal current*. If a leader sees that individual can only exist in their role by having that fellowship with followers, then it is easier for followers to be passionate about their work, to be self-driven and sync their visions with those of the organisation.

### Indigenous knowledge systems

This primary driver, as per the SID (Figure 2 above), is influenced by the *life as a universal current* affinity. The affinity that was placed under this bucket was backbone or decisiveness. Indigenous knowledge systems, according to Nkomo (2006), refer to complex knowledge systems gained over eons by communities as they interact with the environment. The focus group identified decisiveness as an element that falls under this grouping. For African societies to survive in the days of old, they had to be bold and decisive in their decision-making. They learnt this skill over time by making several mistakes and learning from those mistakes and understanding that procrastination is a costly preoccupation. In modern-day organisations, being bold and decisive is a virtue. If leaders stall and procrastinate, this might cost the organisation dearly in instances where quick decision-making is required. A spiritual leader therefore must be bold and decisive in decision-making so that they do not cost the organisation and ultimately the welfare of the employees.

### Spirit of ubuntu

The SID (Figure 2) shows that the *spirit of ubuntu* is affected by *life as a universal current*, *national culture* principles and *IKS*. This means that if a leader is nurturing, understands that life is a universal current and is decisive in their decision-making, this then leads them to embrace what the focus group called the *batho pele* principles. These principles embody virtues like kindness, humility, courtesy, respect, altruistic love and integrity. Nurturing and embracing human fellowship mean that a leader must be kind; love others unconditionally; be courteous, respectful and humble; and have high levels of integrity. A spiritual leader in the South African context therefore has *ubuntu* principles and by understanding *life as a universal current* knows that '*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*' – meaning that 'I am because we are'.

Human fellowship is crucial in the cosmic co-existence of human beings. A spiritual leader embraces these *batho pele* principles where the individual puts people first in organisations and makes sure that their welfare is taken care of.

### Traditionalism

As per the SID (Figure 2), *national culture* principles influence *traditionalism* values such as responsibility, morality, good ethics, accountability and credibility. According to Bhengu (2014), traditionalism relates to adherence to accepted customs, beliefs and practices that shape accepted behaviour, morality and individual characteristics in African society. A highly self-aware leader is a leader who is ethically conscious and holds very high standards of morality. Spiritual leaders need to embrace the values of traditionalism to make sure they lead organisations rationally and equitably. In our current environment, it is especially incumbent upon leaders to lead ethically, as corruption in South Africa is ravaging the fabric of our society.

### Communalism

This affinity is influenced by *IKS*. The *communalism* of management in Africa comes from the belief that individuals are not alone but belong to communities. African management thought states that leaders and managers should focus on promoting the welfare of the entire group and not the individual. *Indigenous knowledge systems* influence *communalism* in that leaders must take very bold decisions that affect not only individuals but the entire organisation. The boldness of the leader impacts the entire organisation, and therefore, decisions must be decisive so that their effects as felt by the whole organisation can be managed.

### Circulator: Cooperative teamwork

A circulator is both a cause and effect at the same time. *Cooperative teamwork* is a circulator that is influenced by *traditionalism*, *spirit of ubuntu* and *communalism*. *Traditionalism* speaks about adherence to certain customs and norms. These customs and norms embolden ethical and responsible leadership. If a leader is ethical, responsible and accountable, the individual will be able to foster a spirit of cooperative teamwork. *Batho pele* principles or the *spirit of ubuntu* in a leader fosters *cooperative teamwork*. *Communalism* principles such as decisiveness foster the *spirit of cooperative teamwork*. As a result of this *communalism*, emphasis is placed on teamwork and the group. Traditional African societies therefore had the wherewithal to care for not only immediate family members but also extended ones. In an organisational perspective, a leader's capacity to share and care for their people is crucial in bringing a spirit of oneness among followers. *Cooperative teamwork* is a cause as well, as mentioned above. Teamwork is crucial in bringing people of different persuasions together for a common cause. It thus leads to intrinsic motivation, as per the above SID.

## Secondary outcomes: Intrinsic motivation, engagement, productivity, performance and employee turnover

### Intrinsic motivation

Motivation is defined by Hermina and Yosepha (2019:71) as a 'condition or energy that moves an employee who is directed or directed to achieve the company's organizational goals'. *Cooperative teamwork*, as articulated above, leads to intrinsic motivation, as per the above SID. Intrinsic motivation is motivation that is not influenced by external factors; it comes from within an individual, without any pressure from any external force. As teams cement their relations and work as a unit, members become encouraged and engaged. This espouses employee productivity and performance. According to Hermina and Yosepha (2019:71), 'The mental attitude of the employees who are pro and positive towards the work situation strengthens their motivation to achieve maximum performance'. A spiritual leader therefore must have the capacity 'to direct the power and potential of subordinates to be willing to work together productively successfully achieving and realizing the goals that have been determined' (Hermina & Yosepha 2019:71). Intrinsically motivated employees are therefore less likely to leave an organisation, and thus employee turnover will be low.

### Engagement

For the purposes of this research, employee engagement is defined by Storey et al. (2008:300) as 'affective commitment which employees make in practice. Affective commitment implies discretionary energy and working hard on the job versus "satisfaction" which focuses on "liking" a job'. As per the SID that was derived from the focus group, intrinsically motivated employees are fully engaged employees. This is because they do not need to be pushed, forced or cajoled into doing their tasks. They are motivated themselves, and they push themselves to do their tasks without the leaders' involvement. Therefore, intrinsic motivation leads to affective commitment, which is defined as employee engagement.

### Performance

For purposes of this research, the definition of performance will be restricted to contextual performance. Contextual performance according to Pradhan and Jena (2017:4) 'is a kind of pro-social behavior demonstrated by individuals in a work set-up. Such behaviours are expected of an employee, but they are not overtly mentioned in one's job description'. Such unexpected behaviour is termed prosocial behaviour, and it is behaviour that is exhibited by an individual that goes beyond the task that is assigned to the individual but is for the benefit of the organisation. Fully engaged employees are less likely to leave the organisation, as their prosocial behaviours would not gravitate them towards exiting the organisation, as they are not selfish in their actions. Employee turnover is thus low. Employee engagement

thus causes employee performance (Hermina & Yosepha 2019), meaning that a fully engaged workforce will lead to high performance.

### Mythology

This is a collection of African myths, legends, folklore, folk tales, folk stories, lore and traditional stories. Creativity, as per the process of axial coding, has been put under this grouping of affinities by focus group members. The definition that was assigned by group members to creativity is to use one's imagination to generate new ideas or methods. Intrinsically motivated employees are creative employees and creative employees improve productivity in organisations.

### Productivity

Employee productivity, referred to as workforce productivity in this research, is defined by Sauermann (2016:2) as 'the ratio between a measure of output and a measure of input'. The different methods of measuring worker productivity are beyond the scope of this research. The productivity of employees, as per the above SID, is influenced by mythology or creativity. Creative employees improve worker productivity, and improved productivity in turn leads to lower employee turnover.

### Employee turnover

This is defined by Iqbal (2010:275), as 'the ratio of the number of organizational members who have left during the period being considered divided by the average number of people in that organization during the period'. This ratio is influenced by several factors, and the concern for the purposes of this research was not to look at the different derivatives of this ratio. As per the SID above, this is influenced by intrinsic motivation, performance and productivity.

### Primary outcome: Employee welfare

The definition of the concept of employee welfare has not found universal acceptance. According to Rao et al. (2015:40), 'The term welfare refers to an act of seeking physical, mental, moral and emotional well-being of an individual'. This is that added dimension that offers satisfaction to an employee that even monetary compensation cannot offer. For purposes of this research, the narrower sense of employee welfare was explored, and this, according to Choudhary (2017:1), means looking at 'the day-to-day problems of the workers and the social relationship at the place of work'. The effects of COVID-19 have placed these social relationships at risk (Long et al. 2022), and it is crucial that spiritual leaders take the initiative to bolster these relationships for the sake of the employees.

As seen from the SID above, employee welfare is a secondary outcome that is linked to employee turnover. The higher the employee turnover, the lower will be employee welfare.

### Results relating to definitions

One of the objectives of this research was to critically examine mainstream SL theory within the context of southern AMP with a view of proposing a new scale. As articulated above, the new scale was created by the focus group interaction. A summative definition of SL, as derived from the IQA process, is thus made imminent. The systematic literature review that was conducted using Kable, Pich and Maslin-Prothero's (2012) 12-step approach showed that there is indeed a lack of a contextualised theory of SL in South Africa. The above IQA process reveals that one can define SL in the South African context as the values, attitudes and behaviours of leaders that capture the collective consciousness of others by recognising the whole being at work through nurturing, compassion, empathy and trust. These spiritual values of leaders foster *ubuntu* principles that via traditionalism and communalism lead to intrinsic motivation, which ultimately leads to a spirit of cooperative teamwork. The symbiotic relationship of these elements leads to certain outcomes like performance, engagement, productivity and finally employee welfare.

### Conclusion

The IQA process conducted on SL did reveal a new construct when AMP groupings were used of the 36 affinities generated. This new theory shows that connection to nature is a primary driver in this theory, which causes life as a universal current that influences national culture and IKS. Both national culture and IKS influence the spirit of *ubuntu* that together with traditionalism and communalism influence cooperative teamwork, which is viewed as the pivot or circulator in the theory. Cooperative teamwork influences intrinsic motivation that together with employee engagement, employee performance, productivity and mythology influence employee turnover, which then impacts employee welfare as a primary outcome. The resultant interaction leads to a new scale that will need to be further tested for reliability and validity on a larger population. This research's main objective was to come up with a contextualised SL model within the ambit of AMP, and this was achieved using the IQA process. The new model is a refreshing alternative to classical leadership theories. It links SL theory with AMP. The new model helps to assess what the enablers of SL are and its inhibitors. It also helps academics assess the effects of a localised SL instrument.

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The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

## Authors' contributions

K.S. was responsible for the conceptualisation, methodology, formal analysis, investigation, resources, writing of the original draft and writing of the final article. A.G. contributed to supervision and the methodology selection.

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## Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available upon reasonable request from A.G.

## Disclaimer

The views expressed in this article are based on the empirical results obtained from the IQA process and do not necessarily represent the views and opinions of the authors.

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