



Employee Engagement and Spiritual Leadership in Private Higher Education in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

Tough competition for talent forces companies to find ways to keep employees engaged. Disengaged workers cost businesses billions and hurt their ability to hire and retain top performers. This problem is also present in higher education. This study critically assesses the relationship between spiritual leadership and employee engagement. The research uses a positivist paradigm. The research employs a deductive approach with a correlational design and a survey strategy to investigate this reality. The target population is full-time employees in private higher education institutions in Gauteng, South Africa. A random sample of 220 out of the estimated population of 1621 was chosen. Data was collected through a questionnaire. The study found a positive linear relationship between spiritual leadership and employee engagement. To this extent, spiritual leadership principles influence employee engagement. This study recommends that organisations provide appropriate conditions informed by spiritual leadership principles. This will encourage employees to display their due role performance and engage accordingly.

Keywords: Spiritual Leadership, Employee Engagement, Vision, Strategy

JEL Classifications: A20

1. INTRODUCTION

This article delves into the nexus between spiritual leadership and employee engagement within private higher education institutions (PHEIs) in Gauteng, South Africa. Employee engagement denotes an employee's fervour and dedication to their work and workplace (Kahn, 1990). Engaged employees are pivotal to organisational success, enhancing customer experiences, superior work quality, and heightened productivity (Peters, 2021).

Scholarship indicates that leadership styles profoundly impact employee engagement (Li, 2018). Spiritual leadership, accentuating purpose and significance, has garnered attention for its potential to nurture employee engagement (Wahid and Mustamil, 2017). This leadership approach aims to instil a vision that inspires a sense of calling and purpose among employees while cultivating a compassionate and supportive organisational culture (Purnami and Senen, 2021). Research across diverse sectors substantiates the

correlation between spiritual leadership and employee engagement (Pradhan et al., 2022; Van der Walt, 2018).

Despite existing research linking spiritual leadership and engagement (Marais and Schutte, 2024), investigations on private higher education in South Africa remain scarce. This paper addresses this void by critically examining the interplay between these variables in this underexplored context. By scrutinising spiritual leadership as a potential precursor to employee engagement, this study provides valuable recommendations for enhancing employee engagement within PHEIs.

This research probes a pressing concern in higher education: Low employee engagement and its association with staff turnover. With only 13% of global employees reported as engaged (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2020), disengaged staff are more prone to depart from their institutions, incurring substantial turnover costs, particularly for valuable talent (Khoza, 2015). This study endeavours to tackle this real-world issue by focusing on South African PHEIs.

The study posits “spiritual leadership” as pivotal in unlocking employee engagement. Unlike religious convictions, spiritual leadership underscores purpose and significance in the workplace, fostering a supportive and inspirational work milieu. While prior research has explored various drivers of engagement, this study discerns a gap - the limited examination of spiritual leadership within the higher education milieu.

By scrutinising the relationship between spiritual leadership and employee engagement in PHEIs, the study furnishes insights for institutions striving to enhance staff retention and foster a more engaged workforce. Understanding how spiritual leadership impacts employee engagement can inform strategies to cultivate a more meaningful and gratifying work atmosphere, ultimately benefiting institutions and their employees.

This research focuses on employees working in higher education institutions (HEIs) across Gauteng, considering a range of job titles and experience levels. The findings aim to be useful for various people within these institutions, including HR policymakers, leaders, managers, and those who put HR policies into action. The study aims to raise awareness among HEIs about spiritual leadership and its potential to improve staff management. By doing this, the research hopes to influence and strengthen HR policies and communication strategies, ultimately helping HEIs keep their employees engaged. This study looks at how to manage staff by focusing on employee engagement. It aims to be a resource for HR professionals, leaders, and managers by introducing them to spiritual leadership as a tool. By implementing these ideas, HEIs can save money on staff turnover and improve management practices within the higher education sector.

Gupta (2015) defines employee engagement as the level at which emotional and rational dedication exists in achieving the organisation’s mission and vision. While Riana (2022) defines employee engagement as the state in which individuals are emotionally and intellectually committed to the organisation. He adds that employee engagement connects the employees’ hands, heads, and hearts with the organisation’s strategy. Kahn (1990) asserts that employee engagement is a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption. It is also viewed as a road map for optimising organisational success. From these few definitions, employee engagement can be summarised as in Table 1 below:

Several core themes emerge in the definitions of spiritual leadership. These include influencing people’s inner lives rather than controlling their actions, prioritising ethics, values, and relationality, intrinsically motivating individuals through shared meaning and purpose, and fostering a workplace built on hope,

Table 1: Summary of employee engagement definition

An investment made for the privilege of future-proofing the organisation’s productivity and performance
A commitment to the organisation
Applying oneself physically, intellectually, and emotionally to one’s role
Achieving the mission and vision of the organisation
Achievement of organisational success

service, and altruistic love to drive commitment and well-being. In essence, spiritual leadership goes beyond tasks and focuses on nurturing the human spirit within both leader and follower.

This study focuses on a critical issue facing HEIs: Employee disengagement and turnover. Over the past two decades, researchers have observed a troubling trend: Employees at all levels often leave for similar institutions, frequently competing with competitors. This weakens the losing institution and strengthens the competitor, incurring significant financial and strategic costs. The changing workplace landscape further amplifies this concern. Automation and technological advancements fundamentally alter work structures, creating fierce competition for skilled talent. As a result, attracting and retaining engaged employees is more critical than ever.

Research suggests a clear link between employee engagement and retention. Engaged employees are likelier to stay with their organisation (Marais and Schutte, 2024). A mere 13% of global employees were reported as highly engaged in 2014, highlighting the need to understand factors that foster engagement and deter turnover. Retention goes beyond simply keeping employees; it ensures continuity, prevents financial losses associated with turnover, and boosts overall morale. The increasing talent competition necessitates strategies for attracting and retaining skilled workforces. Employee dissatisfaction with managers, colleagues, and global mobility trends contribute to higher turnover in HEIs. Organisations invest heavily in creating positive work environments, but disengaged employees ultimately cost a fortune in lost productivity. Gallup’s data shows a global decline in employee engagement, from 22% in 2019 to 21% in 2023. This disengagement translates to a staggering \$7.8 trillion in lost productivity annually.

However, the benefits of engaged employees are undeniable. A Gallup meta-analysis revealed that highly engaged teams experience significant advantages:

- Increased customer loyalty/engagement (10%)
- Higher profitability (23%)
- Enhanced productivity (sales by 18%, production by 14%)
- Lower turnover (18% for high-turnover organisations, 43% for low-turnover organisations) (Pendell, 2022).

These global statistics underline the urgency of addressing employee disengagement in HEIs. Similar challenges regarding staff retention are acknowledged within the South African higher education sector, particularly for academic staff (HESA, 2011). This article explores whether spiritual leadership can contribute to employee engagement in HEIs and, consequently, offers recommendations for the industry.

The observations made in Table 2 by the researchers are based on the literature and may be considered additional factors influencing the study:

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Employee Engagement

Various scholarly perspectives highlight the multifaceted nature of factors influencing employee engagement. Purnami and

Senen (2021) underscore the significance of leadership and vision in shaping employee engagement, while others emphasise organisational performance outcomes and culture as pivotal drivers (Odom et al., 2015). Additionally, organisational size and communication practices contribute to fostering an environment conducive to engagement, with age also considered a potential factor.

Chai (2022) posits that the efficacy of an employee engagement strategy significantly impacts the level of engagement observed within an organisation. Furthermore, the literature identifies several contributing factors to employee engagement, including organisational culture, leadership and management effectiveness, talent mindset, communication strategies, and reputation (Purnami and Senen, 2021). Studies conducted by institutions such as the South African revenue service shed light on the dominant role of leadership in influencing employee engagement levels. Moreover, Patil (2022) argues for the critical integration of employee engagement within performance management frameworks, highlighting shared barriers and interdependencies.

Odom et al. (2015) conducted a longitudinal study revealing key drivers of employee engagement, including promotion of involvement, customer focus, democratisation of the workforce, support for work-life balance, and employee recognition. They advocate for embedding employee engagement within the organisational culture to sustain long-term engagement levels. Gupta (2015) emphasises the pivotal role of employee engagement in organisational effectiveness, stressing the creation of a cohesive community within the workplace. This perspective underscores the importance of employee involvement in organisational initiatives, educational opportunities, and transparent communication practices.

Bharadwaj et al. (2022) proposes a comprehensive framework linking leadership, team dynamics, organisational support, and culture to effectively understand and manage factors impacting employee engagement. Similarly, Moela (2016) identifies a statistically significant positive relationship between organizational culture dimensions and employee engagement, with leadership emerging as a primary predictor.

Merin's (2021) study accentuates the nuanced nature of employee engagement, indicating variations based on individual characteristics and organisational context. Additionally, the study suggests that smaller organisations may exhibit higher levels

Table 2: Observations influencing the study

Studies of what influences employee engagement have concentrated on physical, cognitive and social factors and employee's feelings	Gupta (2015); Truss et al. (2014)
Human resource practice has not yet accommodated spirituality	Chai (2022); University of Minnesota, n.d.
Research on spiritual leadership has primarily been fixated on the link between spiritual leadership and financial performance	Fry (2009)

of engagement, and older employees may demonstrate greater engagement than their younger counterparts. Keir (2016) found that employee engagement is a two-way street: for employees to engage, certain factors must be in place to encourage such engagement. These are the factors that he found should be in place for employees to be engaged: Build trust; Ensure that employees are positive at work and can see how their work contributes to the strategy of the organisation; listen for ideas to engage employees effectively and get everyone involved; allocate roles according to the strengths of employees; and, encourage job rotation.

2.2. Employee Engagement as an Individual-Level Construct

Simon (2017) found that employee engagement is an individual-level construct that shows itself at the behavioural, emotional, and cognitive levels. These are the most common antecedents for employee engagement:

- Organisational communication
- Employee rewards or remuneration and recognition
- Organisational culture and workplace relationships.

Bedarkar (2014) found these drivers of employee engagement: Vision, leadership, communication, immediate supervisor behaviour, team collaboration, training, and career development. Finally, Simon (2017) confirmed that values-based leadership is crucial in employee engagement, specifically regarding engagement's physical, emotional, cognitive, and social components. Based on these studies, Table 3 summarises common antecedents of employee engagement.

The abovementioned factors fall into what Krone (2014) calls human resource practices. This is how the organisation implements its strategy by acquiring, developing, monitoring, and utilising people. The literature shows a link between human resource practices and organisational performance, motivation and commitment, and employee engagement (Bal and De Lange 2015; Almutawa et al., 2015; Rehman and Ahmad, 2015; Marin-Garcia and Tomas, 2016; Neequaye, 2019).

2.3. Spiritual Leadership

Spiritual leaders play a crucial role in the rapidly changing world of work (Beytell, 2013). According to Truss et al. (2014), these changes involve a shift from a stable organisational environment to one characterised by continuous change and a transition from external control and supervision to self-control and self-management. Beytell defines spiritual leaders as individuals who live according to their values, ethics, and attitudes, intrinsically motivating themselves and those they lead while fostering a sense of belonging and membership within the organisation. Her study found a statistically significant relationship between spiritual

Table 3: Antecedents of employee engagement

• Training of employees	• Acknowledgement
• Teamwork and collaboration	• Career development
• Employee involvement and autonomy	• Motivation
• Communication or knowledge sharing	• Leadership
• Performance management or appraisal	• Values-based leadership
• Compensation and incentives	• Vision and mission
• Promotions	• Supervisor behaviour

leadership and the constructs of spirituality, vision, hope or faith, and altruism (Schutte, 2016). A study conducted by Samul (2019) based on 373 publications from 1980 to 2019 indicates that spiritual leadership theory (SLT) is relevant and applicable to creating and maintaining a sustainable workplace for employees. Spiritual leadership encompasses the values, attitudes, and behaviours necessary to intrinsically motivate oneself and others, fostering a sense of spiritual well-being through calling and membership (Fry, 2006). According to Fry (2003), spiritual leadership is a causal leadership theory for organisational transformation designed to establish intrinsically motivated learning organisations.

Fry's spiritual leadership theory highlights vision, altruistic love, hope, and faith, which help leaders provide clear direction, embrace positive values, and remain dedicated to achieving their vision. Spiritual practices can improve these dimensions (Law, 2013). Spiritual leadership creates value across strategic, team, and individual levels, encouraging the development of higher levels of organisational commitment, productivity, and employee well-being (Fry, 2006). This theory suggests a positive relationship between the qualities of spiritual leadership, spiritual survival, organisational productivity, and commitment. Spiritual leaders can help employees manage destructive emotions and improve their sense of belonging and performance. Their display of altruistic love makes employees feel cared for, respected, integrated into their work roles, and able to improve their work performance (Purnami and Senen, 2021).

Through spiritual leadership, employees can be assisted in strengthening their unity and engagement, making their work performance more stable (Jiao and Lee, 2021). Additionally, spiritual leaders can pay attention to employees' development and retention strategies, increasing their unity and confidence in their work (Zou et al., 2020). Spiritual leaders may influence individuals' behaviours and emotions. One of the criteria for being a spiritual leader is implementing emotive policies and behaviours that align with one's emotive principles. Emotion regulation controls one's behaviour when facing employees and can affect employees' behaviour. Emotion regulation is a critical strategy for managing behaviour and outcomes (Kahn, 1990).

From the above discussion of spiritual leadership theory, these points are key:

- Creating a transcendent vision of service to others, giving one a sense of purpose and meaning.
- Establishing a social, organisational culture based on values and altruistic love, whereby one feels a sense of membership and is appreciated and understood by the team.
- Hope or faith is used in this theory as a mechanism to believe in the vision and trust the process of attaining the vision.
- Values of altruistic love address individuals' feelings about their core identity and purpose (Fry, 2003; Law, 2013).

Spiritual leadership is construed as the values, attitudes, and behaviours needed to motivate oneself from within and to motivate others to have a sense of spiritual well-being through calling and membership (Fry, 2006). Hence, spiritual leadership is concerned with a high interest in ethics, values, relationships, and skills and promoting equilibrium between self-worth and others.

2.4. Articulation of a Higher Purpose

Devendhiran and Reeves Wesley (2017) argue that spiritual leaders are committed to a higher purpose. From this, it can be deduced that employees whom such leaders lead tend to find meaning in their lives when they look up to and work towards a higher purpose articulated in the vision of their organisation. Spiritual leaders skillfully align individuals' values with the values of the organisation. Authenticity involves being open and honest with oneself. Spiritual leadership is characterised by congruency between values, thoughts, and behaviour. Spiritual leadership balances financial performance, social responsibility, and ethical treatment of employees (Fry, 2009).

Spiritual leaders tend to be altruistic in their approach. They are committed to serving and empowering others. Employee development is at the centre of this leadership, as there is a belief that developed employees will develop others in the organisation. Spiritual leaders are committed to employees who will increase the competence and commitment of other employees. This can mean spiritual leadership is geared towards employee commitment and/or engagement (Schutte, 2018).

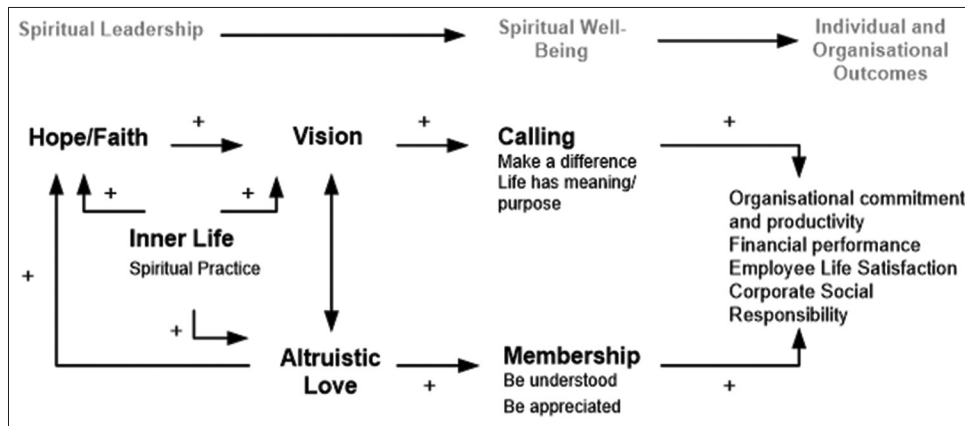
2.5. Fry's Causal Model of Spiritual Leadership

Fry (2009) emphasises the importance of a clear vision guiding a leader. He also highlights the significance of altruistic love, which encompasses positive values such as integrity, patience, forgiveness, kindness, acceptance, gratitude, humility, courage, trust, commitment, and compassion. These values should inform the behaviour of both the leader and the employees. According to Fry, spiritual leadership is successful when the members of an organisation embrace altruistic values to work towards a common vision for the organisation. Fry (2009) argues that hope enables a leader to trust the process and maintain the conviction that the organisation's vision will be realised despite challenges. Spiritual leaders uphold hope and possess strong faith. The outcome of spiritual leadership is the experience of spiritual well-being, which influences employees to feel a sense of calling, make a positive impact, and feel valued within the organisation. Fry (2009) suggests that experiencing spiritual well-being leads to individual and organisational outcomes that enhance organisational commitment and productivity, among other benefits, as in Figure 1 below.

The study can produce various models of spiritual leadership. However, at this stage, it is sufficient to note that the literature suggests a potential connection between spiritual leadership and employee engagement. According to Samul (2019), spiritual leadership involves inspiring employees by instilling spiritual values such as vision, a sense of calling and purpose, connection to each other, and a larger purpose.

3. METHODOLOGY

The researcher adhered to the positivist paradigm to underpin the selected research design. Positivism posits the existence of a singular reality that can be quantifiably measured (Saunders et al., 2012). Consequently, this philosophical standpoint employs quantitative methods to gauge reality. Positivism aligns with the

Figure 1: Fry's causal model of spiritual leadership

Source: Fry, 2009

hypothetico-deductive model of science, which revolves around verifying a priori hypotheses through operationalising variables and measures (Park et al., 2020).

The deductive approach embraced for this study resonates with the positivist paradigm. Such an approach deduces from established knowledge and demonstrates statistical relationships between variables (Saunders et al., 2007). It entails formulating a theory subject to rigorous statistical scrutiny.

The research adopts a quantitative design, within which various methodologies exist, including the correlational design utilised in this study. The primary rationale behind selecting this design stems from the study's intention to employ statistical tests to ascertain the relationship between the researched variables and their degree of association.

The study's target population comprises full-time employees occupying academic and research roles within South African PHEIs. The estimated size of this population is 1621 individuals. Utilising random sampling, the study targeted full-time employees in PHEIs in Gauteng, with a calculated sample size of 220 at a 95% confidence interval and a 5% margin of error. Questionnaires were distributed to 220 randomly selected respondents.

Per the post school education and training report (2020), the national count of full-time academic and research staff is 4017. This report served as a reference to estimate the number of full-time employees in PHEIs. Based on the distribution of full-time academic staff nationally across all provinces, Gauteng hosts 40% of this cohort, equating to 1621 individuals (DHET, 2020). The researcher employed this distribution to estimate the number of full-time employees in PHEIs in Gauteng, constituting the targeted population. Ten percent of this figure, totalling 162 individuals, formed the sample for this study, aligning with Creswell's (2012) recommendation that a minimum of 10% of the targeted population suffices for representative purposes.

The research employed a questionnaire featuring queries aligned with spiritual leadership and employee engagement. The questionnaire was constructed and disseminated through Microsoft

Forms, allowing respondents to access the questionnaire via a provided link and respond to closed-ended questions utilising a Likert scale.

Validity was ensured through referencing prior research, consultation with experts, and establishing clear conceptual definitions. Construct validity was addressed by aligning questions with theoretical definitions and corroborating the instrument's outcomes with similar studies. Additionally, factor analysis was conducted to categorise akin questions and discern the constituent factors comprising the measured concept.

4. FINDINGS

Spearman's rho correlation coefficient test was run on the data to show the relationship between spiritual leadership and employee engagement. The results of the test are presented in Table 4.

Based on this table, the study objectively revealed a positive linear relationship between spiritual leadership and employee engagement. For instance, correlation analysis has proven that when the organisation displays spiritual leadership principles such as care and concern, this positively influences employee engagement. The correlation coefficient was 0.702. This reflects that the more the organisation shows care and interest in promoting spiritual principles, the more the leadership is believed to play a critical role in employee physical engagement. Such findings are consistent with those of Purnami and Senen (2021), who asserted that spiritual leadership is needed to increase engagement at work. Purnami and Senen emphasise that spiritual leadership is critical in creating a vision whereby members of the organisation experience a sense of calling (their life has meaning and makes a difference), establishing an organisational culture based on altruistic love, where leaders and followers have genuine care, concern, and appreciation for both self and others; and producing a sense of membership and a feeling of being understood and appreciated. Spiritual leaders can help employees overcome destructive emotions such as fear, anger, sense of failure and pride, thus improving employees' happiness and organisational performance. In their communication with employees, leaders' selfless love makes employees feel cared for and respected and

Table 4: Spearman's rho correlation coefficient (nonparametric two-tailed test)

	1) When the leadership shows concern and honesty to me, I exert full effort in my job	2) When leadership and my colleagues are at the same wave-length, I collaborate effectively with my colleagues	3) Leadership at my organisation plays a critical role in employee physical engagement	4) Leadership approach has nothing to do with an employees' level of engagement at the workplace	1) I am enthusiastic about my job	2) I have a positive attitude towards my job	3) My organisation retains a much positive team of employees	1) I am fully absorbed by my job	2) I am a reliable member of the organisation	3) My mind is at peace and less stressed and I am able to think clearly
1) I understand and I am committed to my organisation's vision	0.272**	0.273**	0.278**	-0.164*	0.336**	0.413**	0.328**	0.335**	0.337**	0.363**
2) My work gives meaning to my existence	0.262**	0.232**	0.305**	-0.075	0.431**	0.416**	0.294**	0.347**	0.270**	0.332**
3) I see unity and cohesion at my workplace	0.210**	0.218**	0.481**	-0.115	0.240**	0.245**	0.617**	0.269**	0.083	0.389**
4) Spiritual leadership traits are well represented in the organisation's vision	0.636**	0.310**	0.528**	-0.119	0.288**	0.314**	0.780**	0.319**	0.130	0.273**
5) Spiritual leadership is essential for the advancement of the organisation's vision and strategy	0.239**	0.209**	0.275**	-0.690**	0.312**	0.326**	0.346**	0.365**	0.263**	0.320**
1) I always do my best in my work because I have faith in my organisation and its leaders	0.347**	0.362**	0.451**	-0.073	0.369**	0.391**	0.536**	0.311**	0.270**	0.462**
2) I have faith that I will achieve my goals through my job and organisation	0.271**	0.306**	0.416**	-0.080	0.367**	0.389**	0.475**	0.255**	0.303**	0.440**
3) I am aware of where I am going within the organisation and how to achieve the targeted milestones	0.307**	0.387**	0.448**	-0.042	0.353**	0.396**	0.492**	0.329**	0.269**	0.446**
4) I am aware of the organisational hardships along my and I will endure them to achieve goals	0.507**	0.459**	0.449**	-0.074	0.414**	0.391**	0.410**	0.327**	0.292**	0.341**

(Contd...)

Table 4: (Continued)

Spearman's rho	1) When the leadership shows concern and honesty to me, I exert full effort in my job	2) When leadership and my colleagues are at the same wavelength, I collaborate effectively with my colleagues	3) Leadership at my organisation plays a critical role in employee physical engagement	4) Leadership approach has nothing to do with an employees' level of engagement at the workplace	1) I am enthusiastic about my job	2) I have a positive attitude towards my job	3) My organisation retains a much positive team of employees	1) I am fully absorbed by my job	2) I am a reliable member of the organisation	3) My mind is at peace and less stressed and I am able to think clearly
5) The leadership of the organisation express hope that employees execute their duties well	0.374**	0.454**	0.532**	-0.116	0.302**	0.308**	0.488**	0.365**	0.291**	0.397**
1) My organisation really cares about its people and spiritual principles govern the overall concern by leadership	0.290**	0.348**	0.702**	-0.054	0.284**	0.276**	0.602**	0.296**	0.129	0.369**
2) There is a sense of harmony in the organisation	0.284**	0.302**	0.609**	0.008	0.295**	0.298**	0.612**	0.274**	0.131	0.417**
3) I care about and have concern for my colleagues at work	0.513**	0.547**	0.342**	-0.077	0.525**	0.527**	0.371**	0.466**	0.465**	0.401**
4) I value compassion, patience and loyalty at work and I prefer colleagues and leadership to show it to me	0.405**	0.463**	0.294**	-0.105	0.427**	0.414**	0.260**	0.392**	0.433**	0.224**
5) The leadership often display love constantly during the high and low points of operations	0.307**	0.346**	0.584**	-0.064	0.329**	0.346**	0.657**	0.340**	0.168*	0.424**

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed), *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed), c. Listwise n = 203

more integrated into their work roles, thus improving their work performance (Marais and Schutte, 2024). The findings also reflected a strong positive linear relationship with a correlation coefficient of 0.780 when the variables “spiritual leadership” and “employee engagement” were tested. This also means that when spiritual leadership traits are well represented in the organisation’s vision, this positively triggers and influences retaining a positive team and atmosphere. Such findings reflect the findings of Truss et al. (2014) that effective use of spiritual leadership can create an engaging work environment characterised by energy, involvement and efficacy. These are the hallmarks of retaining a well-motivated team of employees. Further, Zou et al. (2020) points out that spiritual leaders can pay attention to employees’ career development and daily life, regulate a reasonable salary system, and choose a talent strategy, increasing employees’ attraction to the organisation, thus reducing the turnover rate and promoting job engagement. In other words, as long as the organisation gives appropriate conditions, employees will show their due role performance. Employees with a high degree of dedication and contribution will perform better at work and be confident in their work if spiritual leaders provide the correct atmosphere for performance.

Further, the study revealed a negative correlation coefficient of -0.690 when respondents were asked to comment on the relationship between the proposition that “Spiritual leadership is essential for the advancement of the organisation’s vision and strategy” and “Leadership approach has nothing to do with an employee’s level of engagement at the workplace.” The results show that respondents believed spiritual leadership to be essential for promoting the organisation’s strategy. The competitiveness of a firm greatly depends on the job engagement of its employees (Anderson and Sun, 2017), and the success of its human resource management largely relies upon employees’ willingness and emotions to engage in their jobs (Bakker et al. 2016). If spiritual leadership is not observed or not embedded in leadership activities, this will conversely contribute to poor employee engagement. The results reflect the finding of Odom et al. (2015) that how the employee displays emotional and rational dedication to the realisation of organisational strategy is influenced by spiritual leadership practices and competencies.

The SLT is thus a causal theory of spiritual leadership, developed in the context of the intrinsic motivation model, which considers vision, hope/faith and altruistic love (Fry, 2003). As discussed, the findings of this study show that employees and leaders depend on spiritual leadership in promoting passion for the job, inspiration, energy and drive, enthusiasm, persistence and focus. As posited further by Fry (2003), the purpose of spiritual leadership is to create vision and value congruence across the empowered team and individuals to raise levels of organisational commitment and productivity. Fry concludes, “To motivate followers, leaders need to connect with their core values and communicate these to the followers through vision and personal actions to create a sense of spiritual survival through calling and membership” (Fry, 2003, p.693). The findings of this study show that spiritual leadership contributes to employee engagement.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper concludes that spiritual leadership and employee engagement are related. It recommends that organisations provide appropriate conditions informed by spiritual leadership principles. This will encourage a display of due role performance and engagement.

The nature of this study is such that it approaches reality from a deductive standpoint and does not go in-depth in exploring the reasons behind the respondents’ responses. In other words, the study is not triangulated. The study limits itself to private HEIs in South Africa in Gauteng and does not generalise to other industries. The study does not look at other types of leadership but limits itself to spiritual leadership.

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