

Relationship between Spiritually Intelligent Leadership and Employee Engagement

Michael Watson, Matthew Kuofie, Richard Dool
Argosy University, USA

emcmike12@gmail.com, mkuofie@argosy.edu, mhkuofie@msn.com, rdool@argosy.edu

Abstract

A leader's behavior has been shown to have the greatest potential to positively impact employee engagement due to frequency of workplace interactions; meanwhile, employee engagement continues to be an organizational issue. In addition to behavior, a range of intelligences is seen to contribute to leadership effectiveness including spiritual intelligence (SI). The purpose of this mixed methods study was to examine the relationship between SI in leaders and employee engagement. Online questionnaires hosted on the data collection platform SurveyMonkey were utilized in the study of seventy-one individuals within two organizations. The Spiritual Intelligence Self-Report Inventory (SISRI-24) was used to measure SI levels in leaders, and the Intellectual, Social, and Affective (ISA) Engagement Scale was administered to measure employee engagement. Follow-up qualitative interviews of eleven individuals (four leaders and seven direct reports) were conducted to gain further insight. Multiple regression analysis was used to measure correlation strength between SI in leaders and employee engagement, while ANOVA was used to measure engagement levels between the groups of direct reports with leaders that held high versus low levels of SI. NVivo software was utilized to identify reoccurring themes in interview responses. Results indicated nonsignificant relationships between overall SI levels and engagement or within groups that reported to leaders with high levels of SI, however, follow-up interviews indicated that personal meaning production (PMP) plays an important role in perceived engagement. The results could contribute to the positive training and development of leaders, and deepen the understanding of the role of SI in employee engagement.

Keywords: spiritual intelligence, employee engagement, spiritually intelligent leadership, personal meaning production.

Introduction

For contemporary business leaders to be effective they must learn how to form trustworthy relationships with all stakeholders while satisfying values-based needs of employees (Koražija, Šarotar Žižek, & Mumel, 2016). Individual leaders have unique skill sets comprised of intelligence, experience, creativity, and learned knowledge, and when used in alignment with organizational mission and vision, are seen to be effective (Peterlin, Dimovski, & Penger, 2013). In addition to these personal characteristics of leaders, a wide-ranging scope of intelligences are seen to contribute to leadership effectiveness including intellectual intelligence (IQ), emotional

intelligence (EI) (Shabnam1 & Tung, 2013), and spiritual intelligence (SI) (Barvydienu̇ & Katilienu̇, 2009; Fry & Slocum JR., 2008; Stupar, Pilav-Velic, & Šahic, 2013).

The Gallup organization described lack of employee engagement as a business crisis for the 21st century, noting that disengaged or partially engaged employees negatively affect profitability due to an unwillingness to fully commit to their work (Sorenson, 2013). Similarly, the Towers Watson's "Global Workforce Study" (2014) reported that globally, only forty percent of employees are highly engaged (Basit & Arshad, 2016). In relation to this, leader behavior had the greatest potential to positively affect employee engagement due to frequency of workplace interactions and from the authority granted to leaders by the organization to enforce or construct strategies that directly affect employee well-being (Chin-Yi Shu, 2015).

Spiritually intelligent leadership (SIL) utilizes spiritual resources in practical ways (Esmaili, Zareh, & Golverdi, 2014) with an emphasis on stability and can provide a foundation upon which employees can remain engaged. Therefore, understanding the potential relationship between SI in leaders and employee engagement can add to previous research on employee well-being (Chan & Siu, 2016; Shuck & Herd, 2012), employee engagement and effectiveness (Mackay, Allen, & Landis, 2017), and employee work satisfaction (Koražija et al., 2016), while also clarifying the definition of spiritual intelligence in relation to multiple intelligence, and leadership theory.

Review of Literature

Spiritual intelligence in leadership is uniquely positioned to be a calming, strong, and stable force while allowing the leader to remain flexible and present during times of internal or external change (Silingiene & Skeriene, 2016). Previous studies show that increased employee engagement reduces turnover, positively impacts operating income, positions the company in a positive light

for potential candidates, and can provide higher total returns to shareholders (Abraham, 2012). Additionally, SI in leaders that intentionally engage both the hearts and mind of their teams has been tied to increased profitability (Koražija et al., 2016).

The positive, interpersonal leadership qualities associated with leaders that effectively express organizational vision and increase employee engagement are found in leaders that utilize logical, emotional, and spiritual intelligence to lead and motivate their teams (Koražija et al., 2016; Zohar, 2005). Previous studies have focused on the relationships between SI in leadership and well-being (Chan & Siu, 2016; Shuck & Herd, 2012) in relation to job satisfaction, or as an indirect link to engagement (Koražija et al., 2016; Torabi & Nadali, 2016). In considering the extent that spiritually intelligent leadership may affect employee engagement, it is necessary to examine seminal and contemporary definitions of spiritual intelligence and employee engagement.

Spiritual Intelligence

Spiritual intelligence, from an organizational and leadership point of view, continues to gain attention as a possible way to combat the stress, chaos, and inherent change evident in a global business environment, and as such, spirituality needs to be understood as an intelligence with its own set of skills, characteristics, and measurable competencies (Fry, 2003). When intelligence is combined with the desire to align personal performance with a greater purpose, then intelligence becomes spiritually guided and can strengthen the desire to connect (Katiliene & Malinauskas, 2011). Thought leader Stephen Covey highlighted the importance of spiritual intelligence for leaders, organizations, and individuals, making spiritual intelligence his eighth discipline (Hyson, 2013).

Spiritual intelligence is also defined as a vehicle to connect with the divine through the use of compassion and wisdom gained through the practice of self-awareness (Maheshwari, 2015).

Santos (2006) also promoted the idea of spiritual intelligence as a relationship with a universal creator that allows for the understanding of the spiritual and natural principles of life (Esmaili et al., 2014).

Emmons (2003) defined spiritual intelligence as “the adaptive use of spiritual information to facilitate everyday problem solving and goal attainment” (p. 176). Specifically, Emmons (2000, 2003) stated that spiritual intelligence is evident in the demonstration of five characteristics; the talent of transcendence, the gift of experiencing spiritual consciousness, the intentional integration of the sacred into all activities, the use of spiritual skills to problem solve, and the ability and willingness to live a virtuous life (Mayer, 2000). Thus, spiritual intelligence is understood to be comprised of a spiritual skillset that individuals can use to promote well-being in others (Joseph & Sailakshmi, 2011) or utilize in problem solving and goal-attainment (Emmons, 2003; Katiliene & Malinauskas, 2011). In agreement with this, Zohar (2005) states that spiritual intelligence can serve to maximize both the rational and logical aspects of cognitive intelligence, along with the emotional intelligence elements of trust-building and self-awareness when guided by the twelve principles of SI and spiritual leader development (Fry & Slocum JR., 2008).

Whereas the work of Gardner (2000) leaned on cognition, information processing, and considered spiritual intelligence from the perspective of religion, others situate spiritual intelligence in amongst morality, motivation, and emotion. Still others have extended Gardner’s definition and association with existentialism to include mental abilities that allow the individual to internally harness, through self-awareness, aspects of transcendence to enrich their life in accordance with four key areas: critical existential thinking, personal meaning production, transcendental awareness, and conscious state expansion (King & DeCicco, 2009).

More recent definitions of spiritual intelligence merge together many of the religious,

spiritual, and social components of previous authors. Wigglesworth (2006) defines SI as “the ability to behave with altruistic love through wisdom and compassion while maintaining inner and outer peace (equanimity) regardless of the circumstances” (p. 29). Wigglesworth’s definition includes 21 skills that make up four quadrants of spiritual intelligence in what she refers to as SQi (see Figure 1) (Wigglesworth, 2006).

<p>Higher Self/Ego self Awareness</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Awareness of own worldview 2. Awareness of life purpose (mission) 3. Awareness of values hierarchy 4. Complexity of inner thought 5. Awareness of Ego self / Higher Self 	<p>Universal Awareness</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Awareness of interconnectedness of all life 7. Awareness of worldviews of others 8. Breadth of time / space perception 9. Awareness of limitations/power of human perception 10. Awareness of Spiritual laws 11. Experience of transcendent oneness
<p>Higher Self/Ego self Mastery</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 12. Commitment to spiritual growth 13. Keeping Higher Self in charge 14. Living your purpose and values 15. Sustaining your faith 16. Seeking guidance from Spirit 	<p>Social Mastery / Spiritual Presence</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 17. A wise and effective spiritual teacher/mentor 18. A wise and effective change agent 19. Makes compassionate and wise decisions 20. A calming, healing presence 21. Being aligned with the ebb and flow of life

Figure 1. The 21 skills that make up the four quadrants of spiritual intelligence. Source: Wigglesworth, 2006.

King (2009) defines spiritual intelligence as sharing aspects of existentialism yet also maintains elements of mental capabilities separate from behavioral traits, resulting in the development of four capabilities: (a) critical existential thinking (CET) or the ability to think purposefully to find meaning; (b) personal meaning production (PMP), extends CET to include the production of a purposeful life; (c) transcendental awareness (TA), as in the conscious awareness of the interconnectedness of all things; and (d) conscious state expansion (CSE), which expands consciousness from a waking state to a higher, more spiritual, cosmic, or altered state of consciousness, achieved through intentional actions such as meditation, relaxation, or concentrated prayer (King & DeCicco, 2009).

Finally, other authors propose a definition of spiritual intelligence as a higher level of intelligence whose primary role is to find meaning in one’s life and to solve complex problems

through questioning thereby creating a structure in which both IQ and emotional intelligence become more effective when used in conjunction with spiritual intelligence as a means of elevating leadership and organizational performance (Shabnam1 & Tung, 2013).

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is often grouped together with employee satisfaction, and yet they are different constructs in that employee engagement deals with employee actions characterized by contributions to organizational behavior and success, whereas employee satisfaction is defined as what or how an employee feels about various aspects of their job (Van Rooy, Whitman, Hart, & Caleo, 2011). Kahn (1990), in his seminal work on employee engagement, notes that the roles one plays at work or home are not as telling as how psychologically, emotionally, and physically present one is while in the role, concluding that when people step fully into themselves, they perform their roles at a higher level.

More recently, employee engagement is described as the emotional and intellectual commitment to an organization and its goals (Vosloban, 2013). A wider-ranging definition of engagement places the concept within the theory of a need-satisfying approach (Shuck & Reio, 2011) and is related to the idea that an individual performs at a high level due to their personal desire to achieve (Ramlall, 2004).

Engagement can also be described by contrasting the positive associations of employee engagement with the idea of employee “burnout,” defined by exhaustion and psychological disassociation, wherein the more positive aspects are emphasized and are found to contribute to evidence suggesting that “engaged workers are likely to perform better than their disengaged peers” (Truss et al., 2013, p. 2659). Another theory of employee engagement related to research

conducted on employee burnout is the Job Demands–Resource (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), which examines engagement through two workplace conditions: (a) job demands, which is defined as the total effort required, mentally, psychologically, or physically by the employee; and (b) job resources, which are defined as all the positive contributing features of a job available by the employee to accomplish goals (Saks & Gruman, 2014).

The Gallup organization, an international company that consistently conducts research and measures employee engagement, talks about the satisfaction-engagement approach, referencing and thus encapsulating, both ideas of employee satisfaction and enthusiasm for their job (Truss, Shantz, Soane, Alfes, & Delbridge, 2013).

Finally, MacLeod and Clarke, as mentioned by Truss et al. (2013), define engagement as a reflection of worker commitment to the company's values and vision, acknowledging that motivation plays a part in engagement and the overall success of the company, while at the same time noting the employee's ability to find meaning also contributes to personal well-being, and engagement.

Research Gap

Spiritually intelligent leaders with a focus on building trustworthy relationships are seen to be of considerable value to organizations in that meaningful relationships can lead to higher levels of engagement and performance (Koražija et al., 2016; Noroozi & Masumabad, 2015; Pawar, 2014; Truss et al., 2013) and can contribute to the sustainability and competitiveness of organizations (M, Muis, Yusuf, & Hamid, 2014). Meanwhile, the Gallup organization's 2013 American Workplace Survey of 350,000 employees in the United States and Canada found that less than thirty percent of employees are engaged (Bates & Weighart, 2014), and eighty-four

percent of C-suite executives rate disengaged employees as their biggest threat to sustainability (Kelleher, 2011). Therefore, there is a need to identify if a leader's spiritual intelligence during an ever-changing and frequently chaotic business environment, can positively engage employees.

Several studies have been conducted regarding employee's SI; however, there is the need to find evidence that spiritual intelligence can positively affect employees and the business economy (Nita, 2014). Minimal research was conducted regarding the impact of leadership spirituality on employee engagement (Shuck & Herd, 2012) or the linking together of leadership behavior and employee engagement (Xu, J., & Thomas, H., 2011).

Establishing a correlation between spiritual intelligence in leadership and increased employee engagement can fill the gap in literature that currently exists, can contribute to organizational development in terms of leadership hiring and training, increase understanding regarding how employee engagement impacts organizational performance, and can add validity to the inclusion of spiritual intelligence as part of the approved multiple intelligences theory.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to discover if there is a correlation between spiritually intelligent leaders and employee engagement. A number of studies have been conducted regarding employee's SI; however, research of spiritual intelligence levels in relation to individual leaders remains an area of need (Koražija et al., 2016).

Methodology

An explanatory mixed-methods research design approach was used for the study. The quantitative research component utilized online, self-directed questionnaires to determine levels of spiritual intelligence present in leaders and of engagement in the leader's direct reports. The qualitative component of the research focused on personnel that agreed to participate in a follow-

up interview. The questionnaires were administered first, and then qualitative follow-up interviews were scheduled as participants completed the online surveys. The purpose of the interviews was phenomenological and sought to clarify data gathered in the questionnaires in relation to individual perspectives regarding spiritual intelligence and engagement.

The research sample population studied resided in two organizations within the same geographic region thereby supporting ease of access to the population. A cluster sampling procedure was used in regards to identifying individuals within the sample population that met the appropriate relationship of leader and direct report. The total population that could take part in the study and that also met the criteria for taking the online questionnaires numbered 80. With a potential population of 80, at a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error at 4%, the final number of participants was 71, which equaled an 89% response rate.

Information regarding spiritual intelligence in leadership and employee engagement was measured utilizing two separately validated survey tools: the SISRI-24, to measure spiritual intelligence in leaders (King & DeCicco, 2009), and the ISA (Soane et al., 2012), to measure engagement in employees.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The overarching research question was to understand to what extent, if any, there was a correlation between employee engagement and a leader's spiritual intelligence. The specific research questions and hypotheses guiding the study were:

RQ 1: Does spiritual intelligence in leaders correlate to employee engagement?

H₀ 1: Spiritual intelligence in leaders does not correlate to employee engagement.

H_A 1: Spiritual intelligence in leaders does correlate to employee engagement.

RQ 2: Does a difference exist in employee engagement between individuals with highly spiritually intelligent leaders, and low spiritually intelligent leaders?

H₀ 2: No difference exists in employee engagement between individuals with highly spiritually intelligent leaders, and low spiritually intelligent leaders.

H_A 2: A difference exists in employee engagement between individuals with highly spiritually intelligent leaders, and low spiritually intelligent leaders.

RQ 3: What are the leader's views on spiritual intelligence as it relates to the workplace?

RQ 4: What are the employee's views on leadership's ability to influence their level of engagement in the workplace?

Questions 1 and 2 were addressed through the use of online questionnaires. Questions 3 and 4 were specific to follow-up interviews.

Results

The current study focused on two separate but related sets of participants (leaders and direct reports) in two different types of organizations (for-profit and not-for-profit) regarding the potential relationship between spiritual intelligence levels in leaders and employee engagement. The final population sample for the two groups of participants was comprised of 23 leaders and 48 employees, those individuals that reported directly to a leader within the company. Although over 20 leaders took the online questionnaire through sorting and verification nine leaders along with 46 of their direct reports were identified as valid and used for analysis related to the quantitative portion of the study.

The independent or predictor variable for H1 was leader spiritual intelligence as measured by the SISRI-24 survey tool developed by King and DeCicco (2009). Response parameters were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale. Composite scores were calculated by averaging case

scores across the 24-items and the composite scores were used as the predictor variable. Four subscales made up the SISRI-24 index. The four scales were: (a) Critical Existential Thinking (CET), (b) Personal Meaning Production (PMP), (c) Transcendental Awareness (TA), and (d) Conscious State Expansion (CSE). The criterion or dependent variable was employee engagement as measured by the ISA employee engagement scale. The scale is comprised of three parts: (a) intellectual, (b) social, and (c) affective. Response parameters were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale. Composite scores were calculated by averaging case scores across the 9-items.

Displayed in Table 1 are descriptive statistics for the criterion and predictor variables used to evaluate the research questions.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of the Criterion and Predictor Variables

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Total Spiritual Intelligence	9	1.380	3.250	2.616	0.649
CET	9	1.570	3.430	2.508	0.655
PMP	9	1.600	4.000	3.111	0.825
TA	9	0.860	3.290	2.508	0.864
CSE	9	0.400	3.400	2.067	0.806
Total Engagement	9	4.780	6.590	5.915	0.521
IE	9	5.000	7.000	6.311	0.579
SE	9	3.330	7.000	5.411	1.086
AE	9	4.670	6.780	6.057	0.715

Note. Valid N (listwise)

9

Note. $N = 9$

Results of RQ1 and Hypothesis 1

Using SPSS 24.0, hypothesis 1 was evaluated using multiple regression analysis to determine if there was a significant relationship between employee engagement and leader spiritual intelligence. Results indicated that a significant relationship did not exist between employee engagement and leader spiritual intelligence, $R = .672$, $R^2 = .451$, $F(4, 8) = 0.822$, $p = .573$. Thus, the null was accepted for RQ1, Hypothesis 1. H_{10} : There is no significant

relationship between employee engagement and leader spiritual intelligence. Displayed in Table 2 is a summary of the regression analysis conducted for hypothesis 1.

Table 2

Model Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for Hypothesis 1

Source	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	Standard Error	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i> ₂	Sig. (<i>p</i>)
Omnibus	0.672	0.451	0.254	0.822	8	0.573

Source	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig. (<i>p</i>)
	<i>B</i>	Std. Error	Beta	<i>t</i>	
(Constant)	5.855	1.111		5.268	0.573
CET	-0.177	0.561	-0.223	-0.316	0.768
PMP	-0.746	1.071	-1.181	-0.696	0.525
TA	1.317	1.19	2.182	1.106	0.331
CSE	-0.232	0.496	-0.359	-0.468	0.664

Note. Criterion variable = Employee engagement, *N* = 9

Results of RQ2 and Hypothesis 2

ANOVA was used to test Hypothesis 2. The independent variable for RQ2, Hypothesis 2 was leaders with high levels of SI (3.0 or above), and the dependent variable was employee engagement, measured with the ISA Engagement scale. The results indicated no significant difference in employee engagement as a function of leader spiritual intelligence level, $F(1, 8) = 2.453$, $p = .161$, partial $\eta^2 = .259$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted. H_0 2: No difference exists in employee engagement between individuals with highly spiritually intelligent leaders, and low spiritually intelligent leaders. Displayed in Table 3 is a model summary of the ANOVA test conducted for hypothesis 2.

Table 3

ANOVA Test Indicating a Non-significant Difference in Engagement as a Function of Leader Spiritual Intelligence

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Observed Power ^b
Corrected Model	.564a	1	0.564	2.453	0.161	0.259	0.273
Intercept	313.912	1	313.912	1365.566	0	0.995	1.000
SI Grouped	0.564	1	0.564	2.453	0.161	0.259	0.273
Error	1.609	7	0.230				
Total	317.022	9					
Corrected Total	2.173	8					

a R Squared = .259 (Adjusted R Squared = .154)

b Computed using alpha = .05

Dependent Variable: Total Engagement

In regards to H2, ANOVA test were run and showed no significant difference. However, partial eta squared numbers indicated that 26% (.259) of the dependent variance could be explained by the leader's level of spiritual intelligence, and this result combined with the reported error rate of .230 or twenty-three percent, explains almost half or forty-nine percent of the variance. This result points to the potential for the study to be further refined and does not on its own rule out the potential for a relationship between levels of SI present in leaders and levels of employee engagement.

Results For RQ3 And RQ4

Organization and Presentation

RQ3 and RQ4 are associated with qualitative, follow-up interviews, and were constructed as a way of gaining further insight into the main research question regarding the potential relationship between spiritual intelligence in leaders and employee engagement. Analysis of the qualitative in-depth interviews was used to identify themes and draw conclusions. The overarching research questions that defined the qualitative portion of the study were:

RQ 3: What are the leader's views on spiritual intelligence as it relates to the workplace?

RQ 4: What are the employee's views on leadership's ability to influence their level of engagement in the workplace?

Results For RQ3

Analysis of transcribed interviews for RQ3 showed that the leaders embraced the idea of God, the Divine, and consciousness as topics, tools, and belief systems that they could rely on to be better leaders. For example, one leader stated, "God is the higher power and He created the universe for us and in us" (anonymous, personal communication, June 2018). While another mused that the "The universe is the entire world, all seen and unseen plus the forces at play, including happenstance and God" (anonymous, personal communication, June 2018). Regarding the theme of Divine Existence, a single subtheme (Proximal Existence) emerged about the theory of life and death. Specifically, one leader felt that "reality is what we make it. I think that reality is fleeting; things change so quickly; if you're not experiencing life in the moment then the reality of life escapes you" (anonymous, personal communication, June, 2018). Proximal existence refers to the idea that life and death revolves around your perception of the universe at a single point in time. Figure 2 displays the leader's reported theory regarding life, death, reality, and existence, and the main theme and subtheme constituted from the data.

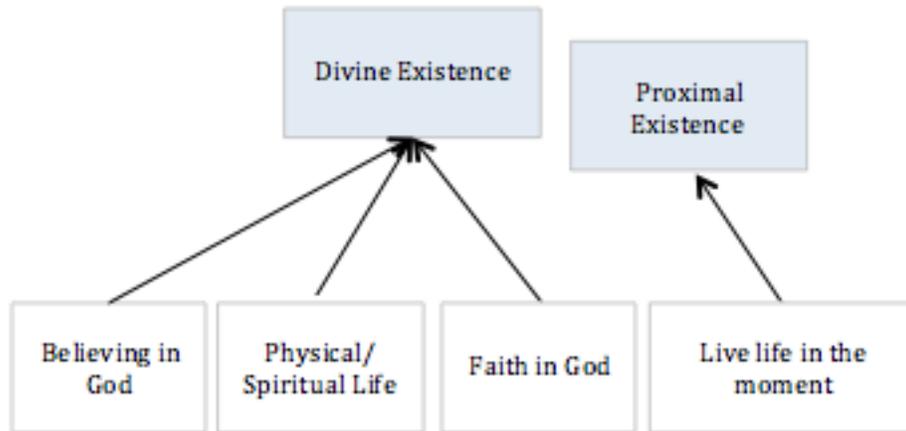


Figure 2. Graphic presentation of Divine Existence theme and related latent constructs obtained from leader’s interviews.

Leaders interviewed communicated agreement with many of the qualities related to spiritual intelligence including critical existential thinking, personal meaning production, and transcendental awareness, but maintained that expressions derived from their beliefs should be personally held. The theme of Meditate was also significant and relates to the subcategory of Conscious State Expansion found in the working definition of spiritual intelligence used for the study. For example, one of the sales managers defined a higher state of consciousness as “self-awareness” and said that he enters into this state “through daily meditation, focused breathing, and encouraging myself to a greater level of self-awareness so as to be able to distinguish between and recognize emotions versus reality” (anonymous, personal communication, June 2018). King and DeCiccio (2009) state that CSE is “triggered by one’s own mental exercises, as in meditation and relaxation” (p. 71). Leaders not only responded to the question with similar terminology regarding consciousness, they did not see the question around states of consciousness as counter to who they were as leaders, thus supporting the notion that the idea of CSE, along with the other subcategories associated with spiritual intelligence, are considered to be relevant aspects of how they lead. The individual approach leaders took in regards to matters of faith and divine presence was supported

by the overall idea that spirituality is experienced by the individual and not the group (Torabi & Nadali, 2016).

Results for RQ4

RQ 4 sought to answer: What are the employee's views on leadership's ability to influence their level of engagement in the workplace? In agreement with the leaders the direct reports cited the importance of having a servant style of leadership if they were to be positively motivated by their leaders to engage. Servant leaders believe they have a moral responsibility to ensure another's growth and development separate from but related to organizational goals (De Clercq, Bouckennooghe, Raja, & Matsyborska, 2014). The theme of developing and showing trust emerged as critically important to the employees in terms of establishing and sharing this value with their peers and leader. For example, one direct report felt that "trust, integrity and servant leadership" were the most important values that she shared (anonymous, personal communication, June 2018).

The direct reports also placed importance on the leader's demonstration of a positive attitude and a willingness to support them in the form of providing autonomy and a source of inspiration. One for-profit direct report said: "Attitude and leadership style" was used to influence her feelings toward her job (anonymous, personal communication, June 2018). However, another direct report reported that her boss regularly used negative reinforcement to affect her feelings.

The employee, with a sigh and deep breath stated:

I personally think that my leader makes me feel like I'm not doing a very good job ever. We as individuals are just grouped into the whole sales team so even though we as individuals might be doing well it does not matter; you are still stressed out if the entire company is not doing well. (anonymous, personal communication, June 2018)

Figure 3 graphically displays the two main themes that surfaced from the direct report's opinion regarding positive reinforcement along with latent constructs derived from the

interviews.

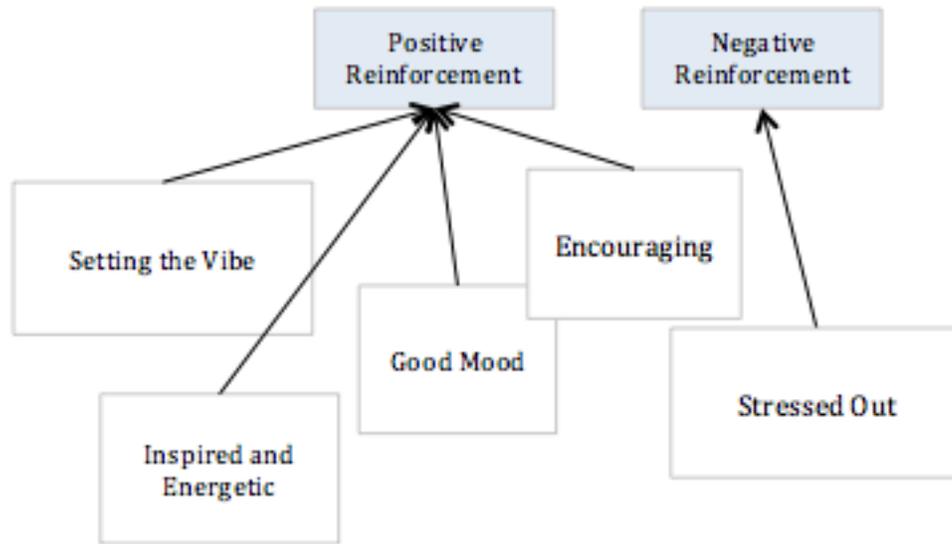


Figure 3. Graphic display of the Positive Reinforcement theme and related latent coding constructs obtained from direct reports.

In relation to the specific theme of Attitude, two of the seven direct reports categorically denied that they recognized their leader’s spiritual presence, and the two participants felt it was not discussed or conveyed at work. However, the other five direct reports did express their recognition of their leader’s spiritual presence, either partially or through obvious behavior. For example, a sales associate stated, “I guess a little bit, I would say in terms of her positivity and attitude” (anonymous, personal communication, June 2018).

In summary for RQ4, direct reports noted that a leader’s attitude and purpose while at work influenced their own feelings about their job and whether or not they felt appreciated. Feeling appreciated and working within a positive environment are both contributors to engagement, thus even though the direct reports interviewed did not directly mention a leader’s ability, they recognized how certain leader characteristics does indeed contribute to elements of engagement.

Based on the qualitative findings for leaders, nine themes and two sub-themes were derived. Table 4 displays the themes and subthemes obtained. In addition, seven direct reports provided their response to each of the six questions asked. Findings revealed six additional themes and one sub-theme.

Table 4

Thematic Summary from Interviews Conducted with Leaders and Direct Reports

Participant Type	Themes	Sub-theme
Leaders	God	Proximal Existence
	Mediate	
	Subliminal Cognition	
	Divine Existence	
	Servant Leadership	Emotive Response
	Episodic Trauma	
	Transactional Response	
	Divine Guidance	
Tranquil		
Direct Reports	Trust/Integrity	Negative Reinforcement
	Positive Reinforcement	
	Servant Leadership	
	Conflicted	
	Attitude	
	Support	

The follow-up interviews of leaders and direct reports revealed a gap of recognition and understanding regarding the connection between characteristics of spiritual intelligence, such as transcendental awareness and personal meaning production with the idea of affective engagement—or how they feel about their work. This unexpected gap was illustrated by direct report responses that emphasized their leaders did not impact their motivation to perform or engage at work, while at the same time stating that how leaders supported, acted, and demonstrated qualities like care, positivity, and support was important.

Conclusions

The main objective of this mixed methods study was to discover the potential relationships between spiritual intelligence found in organizational leaders and employee engagement as it relates to the leader's specific direct reports, $N = 71$ participants. More specifically, the study sought to discover if levels of spiritual intelligence (high/low) in leaders had a significant impact on the willingness of their direct reports to engage at a higher level and subsequently how they felt about their work, for leaders $N = 9$, direct reports $N = 46$.

The expression and use of SI by leaders had a limiting effect on engagement due to a potentially unsupportive culture and or unwillingness by the leaders to freely share positively attributed elements of SI with their direct reports, thus negating the development of relationships that increased engagement. From a quantitative perspective, there was no significant relationship between SI or levels of SI in leaders and employee engagement. However, when coupled with qualitative interview data and themes, there is information that point towards the existence of a relationship although not overtly expressed or considered. SI was present in leaders; however, for SI to be embraced as one of the multiple intelligences currently agreed upon, the discussion of SI must move beyond personal development and meditation and out into organizational training and development. Additionally, the presence and power of SI to engage direct reports must not be hampered by language; thus, SI must be uncoupled from religion and seen as another way to elevate learning and performance. These observations would need to be further explored in future studies to illuminate strength of correlation.

Recommendations for Further Research

The study, being of a postpositivist, exploratory, and interpretive nature, highlights opportunities for future research, both in terms of theory development and concept validation.

First, while over a hundred individuals took part in the online questionnaires and within reliable and proven categories, ultimately the in-depth segment of the study focused on exploring the work of nine leaders and their forty-six direct reports. Thus, future research should pursue the collection of information from greater population samples. Second, the study offers additional opportunities to challenge, expand, refine, and validate the concepts, model, and findings that emerged from the inductive analysis. For example, the idea and definition of spiritual intelligence will need continued refinement and elaboration, in terms of both its component elements, how it's measured, and it's potential to impact employee engagement in an organizational setting. Spiritual intelligence training and development could be examined in relation to career development, onboarding, and when examining an individual's experience.

Finally, the information collected in this research was limited to particular leadership titles and their direct reports. In such, the breadth of information is narrow in comparison to the variety of established organizational structures that exist in the larger business environment. Further research, as recommended, can thus shed light on the dynamics of spiritual intelligence as a vehicle to motivate and impact organizational and individual performance.

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