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BENEVOLENT LEADERSHIP WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF MANAGEMENT EDUCATION: CONTENT AREAS FOR INCLUSION IN CURRICULA

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ABSTRACT
Benevolent leadership has shown great promise in supporting employees wellness, whilst addressing societal and environmental ills. This study sought to explore the extent to which benevolent leadership was considered in management education and to gather data related to which specific content areas need to be included in a course on benevolent education. Through the use of professional contacts, 350 managers with benevolent leadership qualities, were invited to participate in the study, by completing a self-administered survey questionnaire. After 314 questionnaires were received, the data was analysed using a quantitative statistical analysis package (SPSS) to analyse the data. The study found a significant gap related to the inclusion of benevolent leadership in management education. It further found huge support for the development of a course that would cover benevolent leadership in education. Specifically, there was significant support for aspects such as ethical decision making, personal and organizational integrity, corporate sustainability and work and family to be included in the design of this module.

KEY WORDS
Benevolence, leadership, ethical decision-making, corporate sustainability.

In the rapidly evolving landscape of contemporary business organizations, is challenged by poverty, increasing inequalities in rich societies coupled with the fact that human economic activity has encroached upon planetary boundaries (Sachs, 2019, P.197). Within this context, leadership plays a significant role in developing employees that can reconsider issues related to ethics, community and responsibility towards the planet. Hence business education should be built on developing students with benevolent leadership qualities, that can address these issues and demonstrate empathy, kindness and a genuine concern for employee well-being as well (Chan 2017: 897). Benevolence has shown great promise, therefore for not just increasing organizational performance, but also for improving sustainability, social responsibility and concern for the environment (Hussain, Luu, Majoribanks, 2025).

This study presents data from a study in South Africa, which focussed on the extent to which benevolent leadership is considered in management education. It sheds light on the specific content areas that can be considered for inclusion in business education, so that graduates are better prepared to enable benevolent behaviours and practices in the business environment.

There have been dramatic shifts in the business environment in the 21st century in South Africa (Siddiqi, Chick and Dibben 2017: 63). Ethical and moral issues appear to be challenging organisations, as is evident in the escalating levels of fraud and corruption within corporations and the government (Budhram and Geldenhuys 2018: 24; Fourie 2018: 726). Mantzaris (2018: 272) described the types of corruption evident in South Africa, saying that it is related to the misuse of office for personal gain; deceit on the part of perpetrators to receive direct or indirect benefit by defrauding their organisation or entity; the acceptance or extortion of material benefits by officials, private groups, or individuals illegally; and corruption as a result of illegitimate collusion between members of the private or public sectors. He added that this manifested in forms of nepotism, abuse of power, extortion, embezzlement, and bribery. Horne, Venter and Lochner (2018: 129) further commented on

the escalation in procurement fraud within the tender processes at South African organisations. Others discussed the increasing turnover levels, declining levels of employee satisfaction, and increased stress and burnout as being most prevalent in many South African organisations (Makka 2019: 80). Consequently Mantzaris (2018: 276) added that employees are also engaging in theft, and presenting with insubordination, negligence, falsification of records, and misappropriation of property, all of which adds to the poor business culture in South Africa.

It is against this backdrop that international scholars Jaganjac, Abrahamsen, Olsen and Hunnes (2024), who conducted a systematic literature review of 862 articles, over a 40-year period of research on business ethics, lamented the absence of business ethics in education and developed a framework that they referred to as transforming ethics education in business schools. A content analysis of fifteen articles, published between 2016 and 2021 found that discussions related to integration and pedagogical approaches and tools characterised the literature, with a focus on sustainability-related concepts such as the Sustainable Development Goals and the Principles for Responsible Management Education. Hence aspects that can be introduced into education, that will prepare leaders to look beyond exploiting profits and rampant self-interest, to issues of ethics, benevolence in management and social and environmental concern have been discussed in the literature Jamil, Humphries-Kil, Dey, 2024 ; Karakas 2009: 10). In fact, Laasch (2024) called for managers who can manage ethically, responsibly and sustainably, saying that the purpose of management is to reconstruct the economic machine from within, by shifting it from causing social, environmental and ethical problems to solving them. Hence as Karakas, Sarigollu and Manisaligil (2013) argued society demands that corporations and businesses, become part of the solution rather than the problem, which requires that business school leaders and management educators think hard about redefining the future of management education and develop a new generation of leaders who can manage the complexities confronting business and society.

Given the problems described in the South African context, benevolent leadership therefore shows great promise as an important leadership style of relevance, for contemporary business organisations (Mercier and Deslandes 2020: 126; Karakas and Sarigollu 2012: 539). Research has linked positive behaviours and the well-being of employees to benevolent leadership (Luu 2019: 282). Moreover, it has been linked to the organisational citizenship behaviour of employees, which in turn can benefit the entire organisation. Organisations have therefore been advised to develop benevolence amongst their workers who are potential leaders and can bring positive change in the organisation (Kanwal, Rathore and Qaisar 2019: 284).

Older business education management models, which support profitability, hierarchy and competitiveness still exist at South African universities. Whilst they may have served organisations in the past, they are no longer relevant within the context of the current social and economic climate. These models are no longer useful, as research has found that a strong business culture, formalised and hierarchical relationships, and competition are characteristics of destructive business managers (Kulik and Alarcon 2016: 247). South Africa has many examples of embezzlement, corruption, and corporate fraud (Iszatt-White et al. 2017: 237), and a growing culture where crime or fraud pays (Swanepoel and Meiring 2018: 459). This requires that contemporary business education, shifts its lens to a framework which embraces ethics, social responsibility and concern for the environment.

More than two decades ago, the notion of benevolence emerged in the West. It was defined as a philosophical belief in the potential goodness of humankind and the belief that humans should use themselves as instruments to perform good, kind, or charitable acts (Bryson and Crosby 1993: 185). Benevolent leaders have also been described as those who express benevolence, goodwill, positive intentions, and act for the greater good of humankind (Karakas and Sarigollu 2012: 538; Ghosh 2015: 292). Karakas and Sarigollu (2012: 537), who conducted research related to benevolent leadership research, defined it as “the process of creating a virtuous cycle of encouraging and initiating positive change in organisations through (a) ethical decision making; (b) creating a sense of meaning; (c)

inspiring hope and fostering courage for positive action; and (d) leaving a positive impact for the larger community". It therefore focuses strongly on creating benefits, actions, and results that support the "common good," in terms of ensuring shared benefits or positive outcomes for people. The four components that underpin benevolent leadership namely ethical sensitivity, spiritual depth, positive engagement, and community have been increasingly viewed as important within contemporary leadership (Ramachandra and Balasubramanian,2024: 1527; Laasch, 2024).

Scholars such as Budhram and Geldenhuys (2018: 24) and Fourie (2018: 726) have highlighted the tremendous ethical and moral issues that are pervasive in organisations, which have been created by the high levels of fraud in corporations (Harjoto 2017: 765). In addition, problems such as stress and burnout, low morale, and poor job satisfaction have also increased in organisations (Giacalone and Jurkiewicz 2003: 87). Ineffective leadership has been seen as a source of declining industrial productivity and has been viewed as being harmful for both employees and organisations (Akca 2017: 285). It is crucial then to empower graduates with appropriate leadership styles, because effective leadership is important to the success of most organisations (Aalateeg 2017: 35). This requires that new and creative approaches and models to inform graduate training and the leadership and management education system be considered in earnest.

From the onset management education has been tasked with re-developing the capacities of leadership and entrepreneurship, that will be required from executives and managers who can ensure corporate social responsibility and sustainability (de Bettignies 2013: 178). Whilst there is little literature on benevolent leadership education, few scholars have given attention to how aspects of benevolent leadership can bring about change. Karakas (2010: 2) advocated for positive management education, and Karakas, Sarigollu and Manisaligil (2013: 801) asserted that benevolent leadership can be used to advance the principles of responsible management education.

Studies on contemporary leadership and management education have therefore increasingly reflected on whether management education will enable students to deal with the ethical and social challenges they face (Herremans and Murch 2021: 92; Haertle et al. 2017: 67-68). What has emerged is the large divide between management academics, corporations and business schools in terms of the gap between theory and practice, which has resulted in many managers and leaders being unprepared for aspects related to business ethics, corporate social responsibility, and benevolence in the business world (Edwards and Gallagher 2018: 4; Maloni, Palmer, Cohen, Gligor, Grout and Myers 2021: 1).

However, through more in-depth reflection on dominant teaching paradigms, by reconstructing models that are being taught and redesigning curricula, there lies greater opportunity for developing a new cadre of leaders who can develop better organisations and communities, and a more sustainable environment (Kemper, Ballantine and Hall 2019: 1751-1752). Accordingly, Viot and Benraiss-Noailles (2019: 11) argued that leaders require training in benevolence, and therefore, relevant courses should be made available to help them develop better relationships with staff.

In line with this, business schools began to consider redefining their curriculum, to make a change in the mind-set of future leaders or managers. To enable this, the formation of the Principles of Responsible Management Education (PRME) body identified seven principles to guide higher education institutions. Whilst relevant to higher education institutions, they constitute important principles within the context of management education. The seven principles of PRME are as follows:

- "Purpose: To advance responsible management education to foster inclusive prosperity in a world consisting of thriving ecosystems;
- Values: An emphasis to placed on organisational-based responsibility and accountability to society and the environment;
- Teach: A focus on transforming learning environments by integrating responsible management-based concepts and practices into related curriculum and pedagogy;

- Research: A focus related to studying people, businesses, and the state of the world to inspire responsible management and education-based practice;
- Partner: To engage people from academia, business, and government to support advances in responsible and accountable management-based education practices;
- Practice: An aim is to implement responsible as well as accountable management principles by individuals as part of their related governance and operations;
- Share: An aspiration to share successes and failures to enable collective learning and to better enhance living and experiencing a group's common values and purpose" (UNPRME, cited in Radclyffe-Thomas et al. 2025:101142).

Karakas, Sarigollu and Manisaligil (2013: 801) argued that benevolent leadership has the potential to advance the aforementioned principles of responsible management education. They argued that the four paradigms underpinning benevolent leadership, namely ethical sensitivity, spiritual depth, positive engagement and community responsiveness, could easily contribute to achieving the principles of responsible management education. For example, the focus of benevolent leadership on sustainable development through the community paradigm, ensures a shift from economic focus to a balance of profits, spirituality, and social responsibility concerns, as well as service and stewardship. This community perspective also creates a focus on corporate social responsibility and corporate citizenship aspects of a leader's behaviour, particularly in terms of understanding the leader's contribution to society and community (Karakas, Sarigollu and Manisaligil 2013: 803).

MATERIALS AND METHODS OF RESEARCH

Given that this was a previously unexplored area, the questionnaire was developed using the literature as a guide and pilot tested for face validity, with a group of similar participants. A convenience sample of ….were recruited for the study.

A descriptive survey research design was used to explore leaders views on whether benevolent leadership was included in their educational preparedness and to explore specific content areas that needed to be included, in a course on benevolent leadership. Survey questionnaires are useful methodological tools when the intent is to obtain views with regards to an area previously not researched. This study fits within a non-experimental, descriptive or exploratory approach, which is relevant when little is known about a particular issue (Takona, 2023). Surveys are a valuable tool for eliciting otherwise unknown factors such as perceptions, knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and reasoning (Stantcheva, 2023). In this case it was used to gather data related to benevolence within the context of management education.

Non-probability sampling, specifically purposive and snowball sampling were used to recruit benevolent leaders across South Africa. Non-probability sampling strategies are appropriate when the number of elements in a population are unknown or the elements cannot be individually identified (Kumar 2014: 242). As the number of benevolent leaders in South Africa was unknown, this was seen as an appropriate strategy. Judgemental or purposive sampling refers to the researcher's judgement in deciding "who can provide the best information to achieve the objectives" of the study (Kumar 2014: 244). As this was an exploratory study, it was used to recruit managers or leaders from profit and non-profit organisations, small and medium enterprises, and medium to large enterprise, across three major provinces, namely, Western Cape, KZN, and Gauteng. This allowed for the inclusion of participants, that reflected the characteristics of benevolent leadership as it was believed they could best shed light on this. A diverse sample was sought in terms of demographics, background, and attitudes towards benevolence, thereby enabling a diverse sample in terms of sectors, positions, and job experiences. After first identifying a few benevolent leaders, using professional networks, volunteers (who were also benevolent leaders), were sourced to further identify other benevolent leaders, through use of a snowball approach (Karakas 2009: 55). Guided by a definition of benevolent leadership, managers who worked with

exhibited concern for employee well-being and were vested in community upliftment were targeted for inclusion in the study.

Recruitment occurred after the study received ethical clearance from the University Faculty Research Committee. Three hundred and fifty (350) questionnaires were distributed across the three identified provinces, using professional networks. A total of 314 completed surveys, were eventually secured and used for analysis. This final response rate was acceptable, as Karakas' (2009:55), guided that a response rate of 150 participants was viable in exploratory studies.

The survey questionnaire was self-administered; hence each respondent completed the survey and returned it to each professional contact. Each survey had a letter of information and letter of consent, ensuring that respondents were made fully aware of the study, before choosing to participate. The questionnaire had sections which measured benevolence, but also that pertaining to the extent benevolent leadership was embedded in their education. It required that they comment on the content areas for a proposed course on module on benevolent education. This paper reports primarily on the inclusion of benevolent leadership in education.

The data was first encoded and then captured on an Excel spreadsheet, to prepare the data for analysis, using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 2.0). A systematic plan was used to enter the data onto a spreadsheet. It was rechecked to reduce the possibility of errors. Missing data points were also captured. The responses received were encoded and captured accordingly The software package SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) which guides quantitative data analysis, has been widely used in the analysis of survey data (Quinlan et al. 2015: 321). Standard descriptive statistics were computed for the variables, including the frequency, mean, and standard deviation (de Vos, Strydom, Fouché and Delport 2005: 218).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 outlines the extent to which respondents' leadership training included aspects of benevolent leadership. More than 75% (76.4%; n=240) of the sample indicated that their training did not include aspects of benevolent leadership. It was only about 16% (16,2%; n=51) of the sample who expressed that those aspects of benevolent leadership were included in their management training. About 7% (7,4%; n=23) did not respond to this question. This reflects a huge gap in their educational preparedness related to understanding benevolence and its practice in the world of work. Although the study found that the sample was found to demonstrate high levels of benevolent leadership, it would appear then that such high levels were acquired personally or through their experience as leaders instead of through their educational preparedness.

Table 1 – The inclusion of benevolent leadership in education

Benevolent Leadership in Education	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Yes	51	16.2%
No	240	76.4%
Missing Data	23	7.4%
Total	314	100%

Table 2 – Extent to which leadership training included morality, spirituality, positivity or community

n/n	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Missing data	Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		N	%
Morality	25	8	0	0	0	0	5	1.6	10	3.2	274	314	100
Spirituality	1	0.3	8	2.5	11	3.5	4	1.3	9	2.9	281	314	100
Positivity	7	2.2	6	1.9	8	2.5	10	3.2	10	3.2	283	314	100
Community	2	0.6	6	1.9	6	1.9	2	0.6	17	5.4	281	314	100

Table 2 presents data related to the extent to which their training covered the following aspects of benevolent leadership, namely: morality, spirituality, positivity and community. The high percentage of missing data can be attributed to the fact that only those who responded positively to whether their education included benevolent leadership, as evidenced in Table 1, answered this question. Morality was described as business ethics, leadership values, and ethical decision making. Spirituality was described as spiritual actions of leaders and employee spiritual well-being. Positivity was described as strength-based approaches, namely how leaders create positive change in organisations and the world. Community was described as corporate social responsibility and leaders' contribution to society and community service (Karakas, Sarigollu and Manisaligil 2013: 803).

The fact that benevolent leadership and the four dimensions which underpin this leadership style, were not included extensively, in education and training is reflected in Table 2. As is evident in the data, there were higher percentages of those who "strongly disagreed" or "disagreed" or remained "neutral" that morality, spirituality, positivity, and community was covered during their training. Only 8% (n=25) "strongly agreed" that morality was covered, and 4,1% (n=13) "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that positivity had been covered. About 3% (2,8%; n=9) "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that spirituality had been covered, and 2,5% (n=8) "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that community had been covered. In its totality, this reflects a huge gap in education and training with regards to the four aspects of benevolent leadership.

Table 3 – Inclusion of morality, spirituality, positivity and community in education

n/n	Frequency (n)	Percent
Strongly agree	6	1.9
Agree	1	.3
Neutral	9	2.9
Disagree	33	10.5
Strongly Disagree	210	66.9
Missing data	55	17.5

As indicated in Table 3 above, more than 65% (66,9%; n=210), of the sample "strongly disagreed" and a further 10,5% (n=33) "disagreed" that aspects of morality, spirituality, positivity, and community were equally covered during their education. In total this indicates that more than 80,3% (n=252) either "disagreed" or opted to stay "neutral", which lends strong support, for the notion that these aspects were not equally covered as part of benevolent leadership collectively.

Table 4 – Aspects of benevolent leadership requiring attention

n/n	Frequency (n)	Percent
Morality	220	70.1
Spirituality	219	69.7
Positivity	232	73.9
Community responsiveness	205	65.3

Table 4 reflects data with regards to the respondents' views on whether morality, spirituality, positivity, and community responsiveness required greater attention in education. More than 65% of the sample "agreed" that all four aspects, namely morality, spirituality, positivity and community, should receive greater attention in education. The highest level of support, for its inclusion in education, was received for positivity (73,9%; n=232), followed by morality (70,1 %; n=220), spirituality (69,7 %; n=219), and community responsiveness (65, 35; n=205).

Support for the individual aspects of benevolent leadership, namely: ethical sensitivity, spiritual depth, positive engagement, and community responsiveness are however evident in the literature. A report by The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), by the Council on Higher Education emphasised the relevance and importance of business ethics in MBA curricula (Louw and Wessels 2016: 558). In order to investigate whether business ethics

modules were being meaningfully explored in education, a research project was undertaken by Louw and Wessels (2016: 557) to investigate whether business ethics education, had increased between 2003 and 2011 and between 2011 and 2016. A content analysis was undertaken of the MBA (Master of Business Administration) and MBL (Master of Business Leadership) curricula documents of business schools. The study found a decline between 2003 and 2011, and a further decline between 2011 and 2016, in the number of MBA programmes that meaningfully included business ethics in their curricula. Louw and Wessels (2016: 571) concluded from their study that the deliberate and meaningful inclusion of business ethics in MBA programmes was crucial in South Africa. The decline found in South African MBA programmes with regards to the inclusion of business ethics in their curricula, implies a decline in the number of business schools whose focus is on instilling and strengthening moral judgment, values, perspectives, and ways of perceiving the long-term interest of society in their students. This means a loss of opportunities in teaching MBA students good ethical behaviour.

Ethical corporate values however in the form of ethical culture, can guide an organisation's corporate social responsibility decision-making. Moreover, corporate ethical policies are part of an explicit ethical culture, that will strengthen responsible behaviours and constrain irresponsible behaviours (Jones, Felps and Bigley 2007: 138), thus making it an important part of education. Even in an international context, the content of redesigned MBA programs, have been restructured to also include aspects related to eco-sustainabilty and spirituality (Mascarenhas, Thakur and Kumar, 2024 : 111) and ethical leadership in business (McGowan and McGowan, 2024; Jaganjac, Abrahamsen and Olsen, 2024).

Respondents were also asked to comment on the areas they believed that students must address once they assumed leadership roles. These aspects are detailed in Table 5 that follows.

Table 5 – Areas those students must address in their roles as leaders

Areas that students must address in their roles as leaders	Frequency (n)	%
Complexity, i.e. recreating organisation as dynamic and adaptive system	286	91.1
Community, i.e. centring on the social responsibilities of organisations towards society and community service	279	88.9
Creativity, i.e. focussing on innovative and creative thinking within the organisation	280	89.2
Flexibility, i.e. new business models based on flexibility and adaptiveness	277	88.2
Positivity, i.e. centred on positive and strength-based approaches to organisations	277	88,2
Spirituality, i.e. new business models based on flexibility and adaptiveness	250	79,6

Respondents were asked to indicate their support for whether complexity, community, creativity, spirituality, flexibility, and positivity, as explained in Table 5, were aspects that students must be prepared to address in their role as leaders. As such, they also reflect the components that must be included in the educational preparedness of those, who will assume leadership positions.

Table 5 reveals that almost 90% of the sample supported complexity (91,1%; n=286), creativity (89,2%; n=280), community (88,9 %; n=279), flexibility (88,2 %; n=277), and positivity (88,2 %; n=277) as important areas that students must be able to address in their role as leaders. Almost 80% (79,6%; n=250) also supported spirituality as an important aspect that students must be prepared to address in their leadership role. These six different dimensions holistically encompass the individual dimensions of benevolent leadership, that leaders should use to recreate organisations as dynamic and adaptive systems. Leaders can achieve this by encouraging continuous learning, having flexible responses to change by encouraging communication, promoting collaboration, empowering individuals to take initiative and actively redesigning the organization as circumstances evolve. This means that students should be prepared to act as catalysts for change by creating structures that enable self-organization and emergent behaviours to thrive. Community was also identified as an important area, that students should focus on. Wickert (2021) supported this saying that students should take a society-centric focus once they become business leaders. Singh and

Misra (2022) further argued the importance of corporations donating or engaging in a diverse array of philanthropic gestures and contributing to societal development. This can occur through collaborations between civil society, business, investors and government. Creativity and flexibility can refer to targeted strategies that can promote innovation by providing leadership support, facilitating collaboration, allocating resources to experimentation, instilling a risk-taking culture and encouraging innovation. Hence leadership support should include psychological safety, and collaboration and should become an integral part of daily priorities (Chimakati and Macharia, 2024). Although spirituality, received the least support alongside the other five dimensions, it was still supported as important (Wijayanti and Rajiani, 2023: 3). In fact, spiritual leadership has been linked to positive organizational performance in several studies (Elias et al., 2018; Piwowar-Sulej and Iqbal, 2024).

The last aspect focussed on the participants support for broad thematic content areas that must be integrated into a course on benevolent leadership.

Table 6 – Broad themes that must be integrated into a course on benevolent leadership

Broad Themes	Frequency (n)	Percent
Good governance and corporate sustainability	252	80.3
Corporate social responsibility and citizenship	250	79.6
Business philosophy	234	74.5
Bio ethics and sustainability	225	71.7
Ethical dilemmas and decision making	254	80.9
Responsible leadership	256	81.5
Public relations management	210	66.9
Personal integrity and development of organisational integrity systems	243	93.5
Fraud and corruption	232	89.9
Human and worker rights	244	77.7
Ethics of market competition	251	79.9
Corporations and peacebuilding	228	72.6
Intercultural relations	251	79.9
Ethics: finance, human resources, professional, ethical management of business	260	82.8
Work and family	254	80.9

Several broad themes related to a course of benevolent leadership were presented to the respondents. These broad themes are interlinked and can be subsumed under the broad pillars of benevolent leadership, namely: ethical sensitivity, spiritual depth, positive engagement, and community responsiveness. Respondents were asked to indicate whether certain specific elements required consideration within a course on benevolent leadership. There was strong support for aspects that fell under ethical sensitivity, namely: personal integrity and organisational integrity (93,5 %; n=243); fraud and corruption (89,9%; n=232); ethics related to finance; human resources and management of the business (82,8%; n=260); ethical dilemmas and decision making (80,9 %; n=254); and ethics of market competition (79,9%; n=251) to be included in a course on benevolent leadership.

Aspects related to positive engagement, such as work and family (80,9%; n=254), also received very strong support, lending itself to the need for students to be prepared for a good work balance between work life and family life for subordinates. Support was also received for aspects related to spiritual depth, namely, intercultural relations (79,9%; n=251), corporations and peacebuilding (72,6%; n=228), and human and worker rights (77,7%; n=244) to be included in a course on benevolent leadership.

It enables the benevolent leader to extend his/her boundaries beyond the formal organisational context and focuses on the prevailing socio-economic context as a part of social responsiveness (Ghosh 2015: 595). According to Ghosh (2015: 595), the social responsiveness aspect of leadership concerns itself with addressing environmental, social, and community issues that exist around an organisation's environment. It is the "common good" aspect of benevolent leadership, that can be used to extend organisational boundaries such that they can spill over into the operating environment in a way that builds meaningful relationships and partnerships with communities. Ghosh (2015: 595) argued that this prepares leaders to begin social transformation and change beyond organisational

territory and is the way that benevolent leadership is achieved. To this end Eustachio, Filho, Salvia, Lourencao, Guimaraes, Trevisan and Caldana, (2024), argued that business schools should become aware and teach environmental, social and corporate governance, corporate social sustainability and the principles of responsible management education.

Moreover, spirituality, which is a part of benevolent leadership, has also begun to receive significant consideration in management education. To date, literature has grown exponentially which has made a case for executive MBA programmes to incorporate spirituality, self-awareness, and reflection into their leadership development programmes (Mascarenhas, Thakur and Kumar, 2024; Raei, Guenther and Berkley 2024) and for educators to introduce it into management curricula (Burton, Culham and Vu 2021; Huang, Chen, Hussain and Rabeeu, 2024). In fact, Hertz and Friedman (2015: 2158) reported that since 80% of first-year college students were interested in spirituality, it was appropriate to include spiritual values such as making work meaningful, respect for the creativity of employees, and improving the world for all into business courses. Illes and Zsolnai (2015:68) added that there is an imbalance in business education, saying that by introducing spirituality in business education, students could be prepared to deal with the complexities of the workplace and engage their true self to uncover spiritual values that can be transferred to the workplace. To this end, Mayrhofer and Steinbereithner (2016: 303) opined that spirituality had been a blind spot for the goals and values of major business schools in their daily routines and infrastructure, as well as their leadership curricula. Ghosh and Mukherjee (2020: 469) concurred, saying that deeper issues such as spirituality and corporate social responsibility are neglected in management education, and that students must have exposure to these facets during their educational preparedness. Siddiqi, Chick and Dibben (2017: 1) therefore asserted that spirituality was crucial to influencing ethical decision making and was relevant when teaching ethics.

The literature includes several examples of how academics have begun to integrate spiritual topics into their leadership or management classes (Allen and Williams 2020: 38-40). To this end, Friedland and Jain (2020: 4) argued the need for business schools to reframe the purpose of business, reframe the meaning of professional success, and reframe the ethos of business education. Relating to the impact, increasing frequency, and the identified need for spirituality in Business Schools, Marques, Dhiman and Biberman(2014: 200) described an MBA course taught at Stanford University's Graduate School of Business, titled 'The Business World: Moral and Spiritual Inquiry Through Literature', and the University of Notre Dame in Indiana where a similar course is taught, to challenge students "to look beyond prestige and salary and ask whether a potential employer is a good fit morally and spiritually." Pielstick (2005: 153), through his review of a business leadership course, argued that "students as prospective leaders, need to understand issues of reasonable accommodation, religious holidays, display of religious objects, religious practices at work, and so forth". To support spiritual content in business education, several books, such as, A Spiritual Audit of Corporate America: A hard look at Spirituality, Religion and Values in the Workplace, by Ian Mitroff and Elizabeth Denton; Awakening the Corporate Soul: Four Paths to Unleash the power of people at work, by Eric Klein; and The Tao of Leadership, by John Heider (cited in Marques, Dhiman and Biberman 2014: 200), were published.

Positive organisational scholarship, which undergirds the positive management education model proposed by Karakas, Sarigollu and Manisaligil (2013: 803), uses varied theoretical constructs, including virtuousness, resilience, authentic leadership, meaningfulness, and empowerment to explain and enable top performance, excellence, and vitality in organisations. This too, coupled with the teaching of spirituality, ethics, and community responsiveness, may create a foundation for benevolent leadership education. The teaching of these aforementioned constructs, can enable and empower the potential of management students. As Jayakumar and Joshi (2017: 52) argued, the role of management education is to develop the right values amongst management students. Karakas, Sarigollu and Manisaligil (2013: 805) contended that when integrating the four dimensions of benevolent leadership they form a holistic, multidimensional model of positive management education that can be used as the basis of course design and instructional methods.

There has also been a focus on the importance of teaching management student's ethical awareness, which has resulted in the growth of business ethics education in university curricula (Tormo-Carbó, Segui-Mas and Oltra 2016: 162). Mladenovic and Martinov-Bennie (2019: 275), for example, conducted a study that examined students' reflections on how their understanding of ethics was challenged and or changed, and what facilitated the development of ethical decision-making approaches in a first-year accounting course. They found that students had developed a more contextualised view of ethical issues in business, government, and social contexts, including the need to consider their impact on various stakeholders through such a course. They attributed this to their course design which included real cases from newspaper articles, an ethical decision-making framework with various ethical perspectives, a reflective journal component, and the ability to work in groups. Tormo-Carbó, Oltra, Klimkiewicz and Seguí-Mas (2019: 508) concurred saying that students must be taught business ethics using case-based approaches that focus on ethical rules, principles, guidelines, and strategies.

To date, management education has focussed on including discrete elements of benevolent leadership as stand-alone courses on ethics, social responsibility, or spirituality, as opposed to merging its four strands together. This was only until the work of Karakas, Sarigollu and Manisaligil (2013: 804), where they argued that all four aspects, must be taught in an interrelated way, under the umbrella of benevolent leadership. In order to teach the same, they proposed a positive management education model that is based on the following six dimensions: a). fostering integrative and holistic thinking; b). building a sense of community through high quality relationships; c). creative brainstorming and skill building through innovative projects; d). integrating spirituality into the classroom; e). fostering flexibility and empowerment through individualised attention; and f). creating enabling and nurturing learning environments.

In terms of the benevolent leadership course they proposed, they argued that the following learning objectives could be aligned with each pillar of benevolent leadership, as follows:

- To increase ethical sensitivity and awareness of students and to enable them to reflect on management values and business ethics (ethical sensitivity);
- To develop reflective capacities and self-awareness leading to a sense of personal responsibility for humankind (spiritual depth);
- To learn about positive change methods in human systems and implement them through a shared vision, inspiration, hope and courage (positive engagement); and
- To develop a sense of social responsibility through involvement in community organisations and service-learning projects at diverse work placements (community responsiveness).

Several studies have looked at interweaving ethics, corporate social responsibility and sustainability within business education (An nan -Diab and Molin ari, 2017 : 77; Greenberg et al., 2017 pg 208; Kolb et al., 2017 pg 282). Weybrecht, (2017:14) for example argued that sustainability topics be integrated across all business school programmes and initiatives. Kolb et al., (2017), supported this view calling for the integration of business ethics across the curriculum. For business school academics and students to realise the importance of benevolence, they need to educate leaders who have a solid ethical foundation.

They further suggested that the following activities or projects be linked to these learning outcomes in a benevolent leadership course, namely: moral reflection exercises and guest speakers; reflection journals; executive book club; organisational development and change blogs; community service projects; experiential learning; and community service projects (Karakas, Sarigollu and Manisaligil 2013: 804). According to Marques, Dhiman and Biberman (2014: 201), the major thrust of courses on spirituality, includes assessments such as critiquing an existing business entity, on its perceived level of compliance with workplace spirituality, or developing a report on the primary components of a spiritually oriented organisation.

Karakas, Sarigollu and Manisaligil (2013: 804) believed that leadership strengths and skills that could emerge from a course on benevolent leadership, includes a greater sense of moral responsibility, honesty, integrity, self-awareness, a sense of meaning and purpose, inspiring and mobilising people, creativity and innovativeness, and social responsibility. They added that this course has been offered to professionals, managers, and university students in Turkey and Canada, and was designed as intensive leadership development modules, pitched at enhancing social responsibility and global awareness. The following comments were made by students involved in this course:

"Personally I learned so much about managing change and the endless possibilities that I can use in managing a team, creating innovative solutions or creating a business".

"The reflection exercises have provided me with a deeper sense of meaning regarding my work and I have now begun viewing my career as a calling. The reflective elements of the spiritual depth module have enabled me to gain a better understanding of my deepest values, what they mean, and how I can use them for improving the quality of life around me".

"We have been provided with a great variety of organizational change projects and the flexibility to choose our organizations and projects that best fit us".

"We were able to establish dialog with diverse stakeholders while we were designing our service learning projects. We learned how everyone and everything in social systems are interconnected and this has provided us with a holistic view while were designing our projects to advance social innovation" (Karakas, Sarigollu and Manisaligil 2013: 813-815).

Table 7 – Aspects of benevolent leadership in education

Aspects of benevolent leadership in education	Frequency	Percent
Ethical sensitivity	265	84.4
Spiritual depth	224	71.4
Positive engagement	273	87.0
Community responsiveness	250	79.6

In this section, respondents were asked, based on their experience as benevolent leaders, to indicate which aspects of benevolent leadership, namely, ethical sensitivity, spiritual depth, positive engagement, and community responsiveness were important to prepare students for the role of benevolent leaders. As reflected in Table 7, there was strong support for all four dimensions of benevolent leadership. Almost 90% of the sample expressed support for positive engagement (87%; n=273). About 85% of the sample indicated that ethical sensitivity (84,4%; n=265) was important, and almost 80% (79,6%; n=250) supported community responsiveness as an important aspect of student preparedness. Spiritual depth received support from 71,4% (n=224) and was ranked fourth when considering all four aspects of benevolent leadership.

There is strong support in the literature for all four dimensions listed in Table 7. Most importantly, writers do not view each aspect as separate from each other, but highlight their interrelatedness with each other (Salim, 2023; Dumayas and Dura, 2024:228). A study undertaken by Tormo-Carbó et al. (2019: 516) with a Polish sample of management students, also found strong support for the inclusion of business ethics in education. Similarly Sigurjonsson, Vaiman and Arnardottir (2015: 1-13), reported that managers believed that business schools were required to empower students with strong values, perspectives, and methods to discern the long-term interest of society. These managers suggested that "business schools should increase student's fundamental understanding of business ethics strengthen their values and allow for much stronger personal development" (Sigurjonsson et al. 2015: 9). The Declaration on International Business Ethics, which is built on the precepts of justice, mutual respect, stewardship, and honesty (Gasparski 2011: 144), reflect that these four aspects be embedded in business training courses offered at colleges

and universities. This, together with the aspects identified in the previous sub-section, therefore, needs consideration in the design of any educational course. .

There was also support for community responsiveness amongst respondents in the current sample. In line with this, The United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development delineated three pillars of sustainable development, namely, environmental, social, and economic sustainable development (Kemper, Ballantine and Hall 2019: 1751) which reflects the key points related to “education about sustainability”. As Pruzan (2011: 3) stated, management education at some universities is not only to develop students who will work for the transformation of society, but for “all good everywhere”. Their academics seek to teach the best ideas and practices, that express greater values of creativity and sustainability, so as to advance the quality of life for all people. Pruzan (2011: 4), however, described sustainability as a holistic view of corporate governance, which integrates economic, environment, social, and ethical responsibility. This suggests that community responsiveness is linked to ethical sensitivity.

Leadership education has also become influenced by a new perspective termed spiritually based leadership (Piwowar-Sulej and Iqbal, 2024). This is characterised by a stronger trend towards flatter, less hierarchical organisations with significantly less “distance” between the top management and the workers; new forms of organisation and communication; and more self-organising project-teams, where workers from various offices, with different specialisations and competencies, are brought together to meet a specific challenge by a specific deadline. Communication tends to be more dialogical rather than top-down, and competencies focus on meaningful visions, building enthusiasm, a strong sense of purpose amongst employees, personal integrity, the ability to instil confidence, and trustworthiness (Piwowar-Sulej and Iqbal, 2024). Accordingly, these changes have created changes in educational programmes internationally, which emphasised the concepts of business ethics, self-referential organisations, corporate social/societal responsibility, and self-leadership (Pruzan 2011: 7), similar to the themes listed for inclusion in a course on benevolent leadership. This new approach to spiritually based leadership is also supported by the current sample.

Fortune Magazine assessed corporations based on five dimensions, namely: credibility/trustworthiness, (truth/peace), respect (love), fairness (right action, non-violation), meaning of work (right action), and sense of family/community (love). Southwest Airlines, PeopleSoft, Goldman Sachs, and Hewlett-Packard were also some of the well-recognised organisations that were in the top ten, that adhered firmly to high-integrity character and these values that contributed to outstanding growth and performance (Miller 2011: 183). This lends support for including such values in education.

Business school educators can therefore no longer avoid including teaching spirituality in their courses (Jamil, Ab Rahim, Ishak, Nasah, 2024). It has been reported that while the literature on spirituality in management has grown, little exists on teaching spirituality in management courses, which results in business graduates leaving university, without understanding their personal and professional values, their inner driving forces, their short and long-term purposes in life, and the ways in they can contribute to social organisations and society (Price, Bastien, Doucette, Carter-Rogers, Mckay, van Buskirk, 2025).

A survey by Allen and Williams (2015: 142) with graduate leadership and management students, explored their views on the inclusion of spiritual topics in their graduate programmes. It found positive support for the inclusion of spirituality in education. Academics seeking to incorporate spirituality in management pedagogy, used five spiritual principles to guide their teaching. These include self-knowledge, authenticity, respect for others’ beliefs, trust, practising one’s spirituality (e.g. prayer, walking in nature), humility, compassion, and simplicity (Harlos 2000: 617). The emphasis on the virtues of a leader therefore creates the interrelationship between the leader and his/her spirituality in a more direct and explicit way (Dhiman and Marques 2011: 818; Trott 2013: 487).

The purpose of a globally responsible business is to create “economic and societal progress in a globally responsible sustainable way”. In a definition, offered by de Woot (cited in de Bettignies 2013:176), it is the individual person who should rest at the centre of

economic activity. Of significance is the work of the Globally Responsible Leadership Initiative, which indicates that management education should have three fundamental roles, namely, educating and developing globally responsible leaders; enabling business organisations to serve the common good; and engaging in the transformation of business and the economy. De Bettignies (2013: 178) argued for the creation of new, innovative institutions that prioritise the development of individuals, who are able to cope with a more complex world, who view their role as serving society, and who have a more holistic and balanced responsibility towards all stakeholders. This requires a paradigm shift, a commitment from academics, and students who can play a role in curriculum development and academics who support this change. Although corporate managers and corporate employers of graduates are not directly in the midst of universities, they could support the move towards change. As de Bettignies (2013: 178) asserted these stakeholders should work towards a society model that is based on co-operative behaviours as opposed to competitive behaviours, on equity rather than growth, frugality instead of consumption, harmony rather than conflict, and the development of social entrepreneurs who are concerned with society.

There are many standalone courses in ethics and sustainability in the curricula of business schools. Giacalone and Thompson (2006: 270) argued for a “human centered world view” of sustainability. The role of management educators then lies in cultivating the right values amongst management students (Giacalone and Promislo 2013: 90). Support for the inclusion of sustainability in education is based on the “Sustainability Revolution”, which urges organisations that are expanding to become more socially and ecologically responsible is growing internationally. These demands are in addition to the already complex web of resource scarcities, competitive dynamics, institutional requirements, customer demands, investor demands, and other challenges faced by businesses (Stead and Stead 2013: 273). Leaders need to secure innovative ways of meeting consumer demands, whilst using lesser resources and energy; lesser non-reusable, non-renewable, and non-recyclable wastes, lessening the carbon footprint; and contributing to global, social, and economic equity (Winston 2009: 1783). Such transformational change requires a shift in consciousness amongst strategic leaders. Stead and Stead (2013: 276) argued that they “must serve as organisational Green Men, who lead the translation of this new consciousness into meaningful sustainability-based organisational visions and value systems. It has been argued that leadership in building sustainability-based visions, values, and strategic initiatives in organisations should emerge from the highest-level managers, such as chief executive officers, top management teams, and active boards of directors (Stead and Stead 2013: 274).

Table 8 – Course on benevolent leadership

Support for a course on Benevolent Leadership	Frequency	Percent
Yes	290	92.4
No	6	1.9
Missing Data	19	6.1

As reflected in Table 8, there was overwhelming support in the sample for a course on benevolent leadership. More than 90% (92,4%; n=290) stated that they supported a course on benevolent leadership. Only 1,9% (n=6) were not in favour of introducing a course on benevolent leadership. There was missing data for 6,1% of the sample (n=19). This huge level of support was not surprising due to the high level of benevolence evidenced within the sample. The importance of benevolent leadership related to various aspects of organisational performance has been discussed and lends further support for this course. There is also support for benevolent leadership development as a framework, to incorporate principles of responsible management education in leadership courses abroad. To this end, Karakas, Sarigollu and Manisaligil (2013: 805) developed a course entitled ‘Benevolent Leadership and The Global Agenda’, which they offered to professionals, managers, and university students in Turkey and in Canada. The course was organised around the four

benevolent leadership pillars, namely, ethical sensitivity, spiritual depth, positive engagement, and community responsiveness, and contains exercises that will focuses on encouraging benevolent tendencies amongst students.

CONCLUSION

This study provided valuable insights into the extent to which benevolent leadership is considered in South Africa and identified the content areas which emerged, for consideration within business education or management education. Given the support amongst the sample for a course on benevolent education, it is crucial that universities, particularly business schools and management education educators, consider in earnest aspects related to community, ethics, the environment and spirituality within their courses. The findings underscore the need for the introduction of a course or module on benevolent leadership and supported the need for aspects such as corporate social responsibility and citizenship, sustainability and ethics to be included in same. Given the tremendous support emerging from the study, it is crucial then that steps be taken to include the various dimensions of benevolent leadership into existing courses or develop a module which integrates the various aspects of benevolent leadership into a specialised module.

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