

UDC 331

## **A SURVEY ON BENEVOLENT LEADERSHIP AND ITS INFLUENCE ON ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Corporate scandals, the deepening global financial and environmental crisis as well as other societal ills have compelled leaders to rethink leadership styles. Recently benevolent leadership has emerged as a contemporary leadership style with promise to advance business ethics, corporate social responsibility, positive organizational building and workplace spirituality. Guided by quantitative research methodology, with a cross-sectional survey research design, 314 leaders were recruited across South Africa, to investigate the characteristics of benevolent leaders and how their leadership style influenced organizational performance. The study found a high level of benevolent leadership qualities and characteristics, amongst the sample, which consequently influenced their organizational performance in the areas of employee morale, productivity and corporate social responsibility.

### **KEY WORDS**

Benevolent, leadership, ethics, organizational performance.

Corporate character both in South Africa and globally has been questioned in relation to financial as well as with regard to human resource issues, business ethics, environmental policies, human rights, corporate contributions, community development, and workplace success (Marschke, Preziosi and Harrington 2009; Makka 2019: 80). Studies have documented the effects of corruption on economic growth, as countries with higher levels of corruption evidence lower GDP (gross domestic product) growth (Pinho 2018: 18). The sagas of Enron in 2000 and MCI in 2001 and Eskom and South African Airways (SAA) indicate a lack of character, arrogance, and immoral values in management that resulted in widespread organisational, financial, and emotional devastation to employees, customers, and stockholders, as well as penalties and imprisonment for morally bankrupt leadership (Aburdene 2007: 27; Makka 2019: 80). When highly reputable organisations, including small businesses, engage in fraud and corruption, organisational reputability is damaged (Kihl, Ndiaye and Fink 2018: 41).

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The increasingly global world of work, has created the need to promote an organisational environment that enables employee well-being and performance (Petchsawang and McLean 2017: 217), whilst promoting a responsibility towards society and care for the environment (Akca 2017: 285). The word benevolence means goodwill and has been described as individual and holistic concern for the well-being of those at work, their families and society (Li, Rubenstein, Lin, Wang and Chen 2018: 369; Chan 2017: 897). It has shown great promise as an important leadership style in contemporary business organisations (Mercier and Deslandes 2020: 5; Karakas and Sarigollu 2012: 539). Karakas, Sarigollu and Manisaligil (2013: 803) defined benevolent leadership “as the process of creating a virtuous cycle of encouraging and initiating positive change in organizations through ethical decision making, creating a sense of depth and meaning, inspiring hope and fostering courage for positive action, and leaving a positive impact for the larger community”.

A review of literature on benevolence indicates that it focuses on nine themes, namely ethics, respect, trust, kindness, harmony, integrity, justice, interconnection with others and the natural environment, and corporate social responsibility (Xu, Zhao, Xi and Zhao 2018: 743; Wang, Guo, Ni, Shang and Tang 2019: 1; Viot and Benraiss-Noailles 2019: 888). Hence, in essence, benevolent leaders strive to undertake righteous activities and engage in kind or charitable acts as leaders. In terms of the South African context, the philosophy of Ubuntu is aligned with benevolence, as it is linked to compassion, generosity, sharing, kindness, caring, interdependence, and collectivity. Although many African writers have urged for the implementation of leadership that focuses on harmonious relationships, tolerance, compassion, and communality, the financial difficulties experienced by many organisations indicate that leaders and organisations lack the Ubuntu humanitarian philosophy (Makka 2019: 81). This has resulted in the downward spiral which has led to the poor economic climate and widespread corruption and fraud locally. Leadership in South Africa is still premised on top-down models, which are led from the centre, are linear in nature, and have predetermined goals, with approaches that are fundamentally flawed (Iszatt-White, Saunders, Botha, Ladzani, Rudansky-Kloppers and Strydom 2017: 243).

It is within this context that benevolent leadership can be seen as relevant, in terms of addressing problems locally, as they engender many positive behaviours and the well-being of employees (Luu 2019: 282). Given that the organisational citizenship behaviour of employees benefits the entire organisation, corporations have been urged to nurture benevolence amongst their employees, who can through their leadership bring positive change in the organisation (Kanwal, Rathore and Qaisar 2019: 284).

Benevolent leadership has begun to receive considerable attention in the literature as an alternative to developing managers who can lead more ethically and with a commitment to caring for the well-being of their employees and others. Karakas and Sarigollu (2011: 337) described benevolent leaders as those who create observable benefits, actions, or results for common good, which refers to shared benefits for all or most members in an organisation and the community. This definition is consistent with other definitions in the literature that suggest that benevolent leaders exemplify whole-hearted and genuine actions at work, that benefit people around them (Luu 2019: 282; Kanwal, Rathore and Qaisar 2019: 283).

According to Karakas and Sarigollu (2012: 539), benevolent leadership is linked to ethical sensitivity, integrity, ethical leadership, and positive engagement with authentic leadership. Moreover, benevolent leadership is linked to community responsibility, stewardship, and wisdom, which are characteristics of the servant leadership style. As such, Karakas and Sarigollu (2012: 540) contend that benevolent leadership has the potential to bring positive change not only in organisations but can create common good for communities and society as a whole. Much of the international organisational literature and research has already begun to focus on four streams, namely business ethics, corporate social responsibility, positive organisational building, and workplace spirituality, as discrete or separate threads of their research (Ng, Yam and Aguinis 2019: 108; Virakul and Russ-Eft 2019: 201; Koko and Palmer 2019: 2; Sony and Mekoth 2019: 29). However an integration of these four threads or streams into an integrated approach to management, is lacking, which prompted Karakas (2012: 540), to call for same, as he believed that collectively they could create positive change in organisations. Karakas and Sarigollu (2012: 540) therefore suggested that benevolent leadership be adopted as a leadership approach, whereby leaders, work with ethical and spiritual sensitivity, positive engagement, and community responsiveness.

The benevolent leadership model developed by Karakas and Sarigollu (2012: 542), is based on the integration of the following four paradigms:

- *Morality paradigm*, which is linked to business ethics and leadership values. This suggests that ethical behaviour and peaceful values lend to a more positive organisational climate;
- *Spirituality paradigm*, which is interlinked with spirituality at work. This indicates that the spiritual actions of leaders are based on peace and concern for the well-being of employees and the larger society;

- *Positivity paradigm*, which is linked to positive organisational change (how leaders promote positive organisational change). It is also linked to developing a more positive organisational climate, so as to create a sense of peace and well-being amongst employees;
- *Community paradigm*, which emphasises corporate social responsibility and community service. Peace, then, is not just an individual construct but a broader societal concept important for community well-being. Hence, leaders through peaceful initiatives are pivotal in enabling a more positive society.

This model is premised on the belief that benevolence is characterised by all four paradigms as opposed to just one paradigm. Karakas and Sarigollu (2012: 542) proposed that, when integrated holistically, these four interrelated areas, namely *ethics*, *corporate social responsibility*, *positive organisational building*, and *workplace spirituality* can be regarded as benevolent leadership, and that this model can provide leadership practitioners with knowledge to create common good in organisations.

In an international context, the huge body of research has thus far focussed on business ethics and workplace spirituality (Pandey, Gupta and Arora 2009: 318; Milliman, Czaplewski and Ferguson 2003: 438). In South Africa, research has also focussed on business ethics (Kretzschmar and Bentley 2013: 2) and aspects of workplace spirituality (Makka 2019: 80; Labuschagne 2012: 7), as isolated approaches to leadership and management, but not as part of an integrated whole. Attention has begun to grow slowly around benevolent leadership abroad (Karakas and Sarigollu 2012: 541; Gumusluoglu, Karakitapoglu-Aygun and Scandura 2017: 480), which has also documented its benefits as a leadership approach (Ghosh 2015: 593; Shen, Chou, Wei and Zhang 2017: 1101; Tan, Zawawi and Aziz 2016: 343).

An earlier study by Karakas (2009: 209) found that benevolent leadership was positively linked to organisational performance, particularly profitability, managerial effectiveness in the organisation, employee morale and productivity, business ethics, and corporate social responsibility. It is within this context that the current study sought to explore benevolent behaviour amongst managers in South Africa and its influence on organisational performance. Research has linked positive behaviours and the well-being of employees to benevolent leadership (Luu 2019: 282). Moreover, it has been linked to improving team processes which influences the organisational citizenship behaviour of employees, which consequently enhances organisational performance (Kanwal, Rathore and Qaisar 2019: 284; Wang and Wang 2018: 688). Others such as Hutchins (2019: 40) detailed the positive organisational effects that benevolent leadership has had on both employee and societal well-being. In particular, her study found that benevolent leadership enhances employee engagement, retention, and well-being. Moreover benevolence has been associated with employee perceptions that their leader is a warm, caring person who is aware of and concerned with the needs and well-being of others (Stedham and Skaar 2019: 1588).

In addition, benevolent leadership holds promise in terms of building a more ethical business climate. Erkutlu and Chafra (2016:372), wrote that benevolent leaders display a greater sense of personal integrity, which together with their commitment to ethical relationships leads to unconditional loyalty amongst subordinates and other stakeholders. Most importantly, however, is the fact that benevolent leadership emphasises altruistic non-business relationships between business organisations and diverse community stakeholders (Karakas and Sarigollu 2013: 663). It promotes good corporate citizenship and strategic philanthropy which is crucial to helping uplift poor and disadvantaged communities in South Africa.

Research has also shown that benevolent leadership is positively associated consistently with workplace outcomes such as organisational commitment, loyalty, and trust in leaders (Karakas and Sarigollu 2012: 547; Pellegrini and Scandura 2006: 264; 2008: 566). Studies have found that when subordinates of benevolent leaders feel valued (Wang and Cheng 2010: 106), they have higher levels of trust which enables more innovative behaviour (Farh and Cheng 2000: 85). A study undertaken by Xu, Zhao, Xi and Zhao (2018: 750) found that followers of benevolent leaders were more likely to experience positive emotions and

have enhanced energy, which resulted in constructive efforts to bring about functional change.

Benevolent leaders not only direct their subordinates but also strive to create a family feeling amongst them. In doing so, their identification with team members and across departments enables collaboration across teams (Gumusluoglu, Karakitapoglu-Aygun and Scandura 2017: 480), which fosters a close relationship between employees and their subordinates (Erben and Guneser 2008: 965). Moreover these leaders show greater concern for employees and their family well-being., jointly celebrate special occasions, such as birthdays and weddings and providing support during stressful experiences, such as a death (Gumusluoglu, Karakitapoglu-Aygun and Scandura 2017: 480).

Evidence exists to support the positive effect of benevolent leadership on subordinates, with outcomes that include respect and being satisfied with the leader, organisational commitment, job performance, and organisational citizenship behaviour (Wang and Cheng 2010: 110). Other studies have shown also the potential of benevolent leadership to positively affect subordinates' performance (Scandura and Jaidyanathan 2010: 391), particularly through psychological empowerment (Pieterse, Knippenberg, Schippers and Stam 2009: 615). A longitudinal study with a sample of 132 employees in a manufacturing organisation in China found that benevolent leadership increased subordinates' performance (Chan 2017: 897). Studies have shown that benevolent leadership promotes subordinates' gratitude towards such leaders and identification with benevolent leaders (Cheng *et al.* 2004: 90; Farh *et al.* 2006: 235). Benevolent leadership, then, has been shown to have positive outcomes where employees experience support and psychologically empowering opportunities and relationships (Chan 2017: 906). Empowerment, particularly within the context of the leader-subordinate relationship, creates outcomes that include work performance, job satisfaction, and lower turnover rates (Harris, Wheeler and Kacmar 2009: 371). Benevolent leadership has also been found to improve team performance. A study by Gumusluoglu, Karakitapoglu-Aygun and Scandura (2017: 1), found that individuals with benevolent leaders tended to display more innovative behaviour within their teams, particularly where employees identify strongly with team members.

Whilst there are not many studies related to the impact and outcomes of benevolent leadership, there are many studies which show that its individual streams have beneficial effects. For example, some studies have shown the positive relationship between ethical leaders and their followers organisational citizenship behaviour (Kacmar, Andrews, Harris and Tepper 2013: 35). There have been other studies which demonstrate how the spiritual stream of benevolent leadership influences employees organisational citizenship behaviour (Ahmadi, Nami and Barvarz 2014: 264). Positive engagement, which is part of the vitality stream of benevolent leadership, has also been found to affect organisational citizenship behaviour directly (Ghosh 2015: 593; Tan, Zawawi and Aziz 2016: 343).

It is against this backdrop that the current study sought to understand the behavioural characteristics and attitudes of benevolent leaders and the approaches they used in South Africa and how it influenced organisational performance.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS OF RESEARCH**

The study was designed as a cross-sectional survey, to investigate the characteristics and behaviours of those managers or leaders who demonstrated elements of benevolence in their work and how this influenced organizational performance. This study fits within a non-experimental, descriptive or exploratory approach, which is used when little is known about a particular phenomenon (Walker 2005: 580). Descriptive designs present an accurate reflection of the characteristics of individuals, situations, or groups, and the frequency with which certain phenomena occurred, using statistics to describe, reflect, and summarise the data (Polit and Hungler 2013: 158).

A non-probability sampling approach was used to recruit participants, specifically purposive and snowball sampling approaches. Non-probability sampling strategies "are used when either the number of elements in a population is 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 the 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, judgemental sampling was utilised to recruit managers or leaders from profit and non-profit organisations, small and medium enterprises, and medium to large enterprises in three major provinces, namely, Western Cape, KZN, and Gauteng. This allowed for the inclusion of participants, based on the judgement of the researcher, that reflected the most characteristic, representative, or typical attributes of the population that best suited the purposes of the study (Strydom 2011: 232). In this case, it was benevolent leadership. The researcher heeded Karakas' (2009: 55) suggestion of seeking a diverse sample in terms of demographics, background, and attitudes towards benevolence. This was to ensure diversity in terms of sectors, positions, and job experiences. After identifying a few participants through professional contacts, the researcher recruited volunteers (who were also benevolent leaders), as per Karakas' (2009: 55) suggestion, to recruit participants in this way. They in turn agreed to assist in distributing the surveys to other professional contacts in all of the three provinces. Hence, a *snowball sampling* method was used in conjunction with purposive sampling. As per the operational definition of benevolent leadership, managers who worked with compassion and concern for those in the workplace and society were included in the study.

The recruitment of participants, occurred after the study received ethical clearance from the University Faculty Research Committee. Three hundred and fifty (350) questionnaires were distributed in the three different provinces, through professional contacts and 314 completed surveys, were eventually secured and were utilised. The final response rate was deemed acceptable in light of Karakas' (2009:55) stipulation of 150 questionnaires, in exploratory studies.

The instrument was a self-administered questionnaire, which each participant had to complete and return to each professional contact. A letter of information was attached to every questionnaire, containing information regarding the study and a letter of consent which participants also had to sign, if they chose to participate. The questionnaire contained two scales (the Benevolent Leadership Scale and Organisational Performance Scale), which served as the measuring instruments to meet the first two objectives of the study, namely: to investigate the characteristics, attitudes, and behaviours of benevolent leaders and how benevolence influenced organisational performance. The scales used in the survey questionnaire were taken from the instrument designed by Karakas (2009: 56). The questionnaire comprised of information on demographic data, The Benevolent Leadership Scale, which comprises of four sub-scales, namely: Ethical Sensitivity, Spiritual Depth, Positive Engagement, and Community Responsiveness and also the Organisational Performance Scale. Written permission was obtained to use the four aforementioned sub-scales (that formed part of benevolent leadership) and the Organisational Performance Scale from the questionnaire developed in Karakas' (2009: 54-63) study. Demographic information focussed on age, gender, racial background, and marital status and number of years employed in current organisation. Most of the sub-scales used a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree", and participants were asked to write the response that most accurately described their level of agreement with several statements. In the fifth sub-scale participants were asked to rate key areas of organisational performance using the following questions, such as: "how would you compare the organization's performance over the past three years to that of other organizations that do the same kind of work?" Responses were made on a 5-point Likert-type scale: 1 ("much worse"), 2 ("worse"), 3 ("equal"), and 4 ("better"), and 5 ("much better"). Some of the following dimensions of organisational performance that were rated on this scale included, namely: financial performance indicators; managerial effectiveness in the organisation; employee morale; employee productivity; business ethics; and long-term organisational health. Karakas (2009: 62) included the dimensions in the Organisational Performance Scale to determine whether benevolent leadership attitudes and behaviours at the individual leader's level, were also

perceived at the organisational level. In effect, he sought to understand if the individual leader's benevolent characteristics (namely, their *ethical sensitivity*; *spiritual depth*, *positive engagement*, and *community responsiveness*) accrue in relation to perceived organisational performance in areas such as business ethics, corporate social responsibility, and innovation, amongst others. This relationship was also explored within the current study. This instrument has shown good reliability and validity in previous studies Karakas (2009: 93).

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

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This paper presents data from the four sub-scales that make up Benevolent Leadership, namely, ethical sensitivity, spiritual depth, positive engagement and community responsiveness scale.

### Ethical Sensitivity

Table 1 outlines data in respect of the ethical sensitivity scale. The overall mean of this scale was found to be 4.53 (SD=0.438), which demonstrated a strong level of ethical sensitivity amongst the sample. Karakas (2009: 81), reported a similar overall mean for this scale, in his study, namely, 4.22 (SD=0.4860). The highest mean (4.59), found on this scale, related to the item "*work guided by high ethical standards*". The second highest mean variable (4.58), related to the item "*I take a moral stand when I believe in something*". The items "*I take ethical rules seriously*" and "*my behaviours are congruent with ethical values and beliefs*" had the third highest mean, (4.57), in the current study. In Karakas' (2009: 81) study, the highest means reported for this scale were for the following two variables, viz. "*take a moral stand*" (4.35; SD=.70) and "*keep promises and commitment*" (4.35; SD =.7.11). The findings made in the current study, resonated with that of Karakas' (2009: 81), who also found that "*take a moral stand*", received a high mean rating.

Table 1 – Ethical Sensitivity Scale

Variable (items abbreviated)	N	Missing	Mean	Standard Deviation	Min.	Max.
Reflect on ethical consequences of decision	311	3	4.46	.620	2	5
Take a moral stand	311	3	4.58	.508	3	5
Take ethical rules seriously	310	4	4.57	.533	3	5
Behaviours congruent with ethical values and beliefs	311	3	4.57	.540	3	5
Keep promises and commitments	311	3	4.56	.541	1	5
Stand up for what is right	311	3	4.49	.642	1	5
Take responsibility for mistakes	310	4	4.56	.614	1	5
Role model of integrity and honesty	311	3	4.56	.540	3	5
Challenge colleagues when they depart from ethical values	311	3	4.42	.741	1	5
Work guided by high ethical standards	303	11	4.59	.543	2	5

The item "*I challenge my colleagues when they depart from ethical values at work*" had the lowest mean of 4.42 (0.741) in the present study and in Karakas' (2009: 81) study (M 3.87; SD=0.823). These findings reflect that leaders displayed a high level of ethical sensitivity by working with a high level of ethical standards, by taking a moral stand, and by engaging in behaviours that are congruent with ethical values and beliefs. Ethical leaders are more likely to set examples of the way things should be in terms of ethics and consequently, more likely to make fair and balanced decisions (Xu, Loi and Ngo 2016: 495). Ethical sensitivity is an important aspect of benevolent leadership and hence the priorities and

behaviours of ethical leaders and business ethics should be reflected within organisational practices (Kuenzi, Mayer and Greenbaum 2018: 48). Research on ethical leadership, has found that it enhances employees' organisational citizenship behaviour (Zhang, Zhang, Liu, Duan, Xu and Cheung 2019: 18; Shareef and Atan 2019: 583), as ethical leaders then play a pivotal role in creating an ethical and positive work environment whilst enhancing employee attitudes and behaviour (Mitonga-Monga 2018: 4). Work ethics culture has been described as the ethical quality of an organisation, which is seen as shared values, norms, and beliefs that enable and nurture ethical behaviour (Huhtala, Kaptein and Feldt 2016: 337).

A study conducted by Robinson and Jonker (2017: 72-73), with 13 business leaders found that 84% of the sample strongly believed that their personal values were evident within the business culture. With regards to business ethics being an imperative, this entire sample agreed that acting ethically was critical to their business success as they believed that unethical behaviour could destroy their business. In fact the King Reports (I, II, III, IV), which were published in 1994 by the Institute of Directors in Southern Africa, detailed the need for rigorous business ethics principles that do not permit fraudulent or deceptive actions related to customer transactions (Roberts-Lombard *et al.* 2019: 380). Drechsel (2016) noted that the King Report IV emphasised several key foci of a sound code of ethics, namely, ethical and effective leadership; the role of the company and its responsibility towards its surrounding community; corporate citizenship; sustainable development; stakeholder inclusivity and responsiveness; as well as integrated reporting and thinking. This Report emphasises the need for ethical sensitivity as a key component of good leadership behaviour and has relevance for good ethical practice in South Africa.

The Kings Reports are supported by growing research evidence which suggests that ethical leadership not only deters followers from engaging in immoral behaviour, such as workplace incivility or organisational deviance (van Gils, van Quaquebeke, van Knippenberg, van Dijke and De Cremer 2015: 192-193), but that it inspires positive organisational citizenship behaviour amongst employees (Mo and Shi 2017: 295). Findings from this study as well as that of Karakas (2009: 93) revealed a high level of *ethical sensitivity* amongst benevolent leaders.

### Spiritual Depth

Table 2, contains data obtained in respect of the second scale, namely, the Spiritual Depth Scale. The overall mean for the Spiritual Depth Scale, was 4.14 ( $SD=0.643$ ). Karakas (2009: 83), reported a significantly lower mean of 3.78, than that obtained in the present study. It was also significantly lower, in comparison to all the other three sub-scales in his study, namely, the ethical sensitivity scale, positive engagement scale, and community responsiveness scale. The data, reflected in Table 2 indicated that there was significantly greater variation in terms of spiritual orientation of the respondents with respect to other variables. The highest mean item on this scale was 4.33 ( $SD= 0.660$ ) and belonged to the item "*searching for something that makes my life feel significant and satisfying*". It was noteworthy that Karakas (2009: 83) also found that this item had the highest mean on this scale, viz. 4,00 ( $SD=.864$ ). The belief "*that we are all interconnected and part of a meaningful whole*" (4,27;  $SD=.867$ ), that "*spirituality makes me a more helpful and compassionate person*" (4.17;  $SD=.775$ ), and "*spirituality makes me a gentler person towards colleagues*" (4,16;  $SD=.755$ ) also received higher mean ratings, in the current study. Collectively they reflect that leaders believe that they are connected to their subordinates within the organisation, and that their personal spirituality enables them to be more compassionate and helpful in their leadership approach.

The lowest mean, found was for the item, "*spend time on self-reflection, meditation or prayer at work*" (3.82;  $SD=.903$ ), which suggests that leaders endeavour to keep spirituality separate from work. This might be due to arguments that spiritual activities, such as prayer or meditation, may be seen to be embedded within religion and that whilst leaders may engage in these spiritual activities outside of work, they do not see them as being appropriate to engage in at a personal level whilst at work. Karakas (2009: 82) found that the item "*incorporate spirituality into work done*" (3.47;  $SD=1.029$ ) had the overall lowest mean

on this scale in his study, which concurs with writers who believe that spirituality is more a personal experience that should remain outside the work context (Pruzan 2011: 35; Phipps and Benefiel 2013: 33).

Table 2 – Spiritual Depth Scale

Variable (items abbreviated)	N	Missing	Mean	Std. Deviation	Min.	Max.
Spend time on self-reflection, meditation, or prayer at work	307	7	3.82	.903	1	5
Try to find a deeper sense of meaning at work and in leadership	307	7	4.20	.661	1	5
Incorporate spirituality into work done	303	11	3.95	.925	1	5
Believe that we are all interconnected and part of a meaningful whole	304	14	4.27	.867	1	5
Feel vitally alive and passionate when I bring my soul into work	300	13	4.11	.867	1	5
Spirituality makes me a more helpful and compassionate leader	301	13	4.17	.775	1	5
Spirituality makes me a gentler person towards colleagues	301	13	4.16	.755	1	5
Try to nurture or support the spiritual growth of my colleagues around me	301	13	3.91	.890	1	5
When faced with an important decision, spirituality plays an important role	301	13	4.15	.803	1	5
Searching for something that makes my life feel significant and satisfying	298	16	4.33	.660	1	5
Graduates' management training should include spirituality in the curriculum	301	13	4.27	1.00	1	5

Spiritual leadership has been described as delivering faith or hope, through a spiritually embedded vision and through a process of creating that vision for subordinates or followers (Wang *et al.* 2019: 3). Fairholm (2000), argued that a leader's spiritual core (the spirit), was an important agent of guidance, and in turn developed a model of spiritual leadership that promoted cooperation, trust, mutual care, and a commitment to team and organisational effectiveness (Al Arkoubi 2013: 105). Barrett (cited in Law 2016: 444) said that spiritual leaders are more likely to establish value-based organisations which are highly successful, profitable, and more productive, because the nature of their commitment with employees brings about greater commitment amongst them.

A study conducted by Chen, Jiang, Zhang and Chu (2019: 1206), with 188 subordinate-leader dyads in organisations in China found that spiritual leadership had a hugely beneficial effect on work behaviour. They found that spiritual leadership positively influences organisational identification, and that the latter influences psychological safety, which consequently encourages the proactive behaviour of employees and pro-active work behaviour. These findings support the importance of *spiritual depth* and the various attitudes, characteristics, and behaviours embedded in the scale as part of a benevolent approach to leadership.

### Positive Engagement Scale

The Positive Engagement Scale is the third scale, embedded in benevolent leadership. The overall mean for this scale, was found to be 4.39 ( $SD=0.476$ ). The overall mean of this scale in Karakas' (2009: 84) study was slightly lower (4.09;  $SD=0.457$ ). The overall means for all the items on this scale, as evident in Table 3, were all above 4.00, unlike the other three scales, which had means that were slightly lower. This suggests a strong desire amongst leaders to create positivity, both in the organisation and outside it.

The highest mean on this scale was 4.44 ( $SD=0.53$ ), for the item "*I am open minded about new ideas to create change and innovation in the organisation*". The other highest means were for the following variables, "*I have a fundamental belief in our abilities to produce positive results in this organisation*" (4.43;  $SD=0.59$ ); "*I strive to communicate a clear and positive vision of the future*" (4.41;  $SD=5.00$ ); and "*I try to provide hope and courage for people around me to take positive action*" (4.41;  $SD=0.53$ ). In Karakas' (2009: 84), study the highest mean was also obtained for the item, "*I am open-minded about new ideas to create change and innovation in the organisation*" (4.22;  $SD=.70$ ).

Karakas, Sarigollu and Manisaligil (2013: 809) described positively engaged leaders as those who inspire people, bring hope, and create positive change in human systems. Hence, positive engagement is linked to how organisations can be transformed using strength-based approaches, such as inspiring and empowering followers or subordinates, creating and leading self-motivated teams, providing courage for action, and working collaboratively

towards positive change. The intent then is to reinvigorate the organisation and create vitality by empowering the human potential of employees.

Table 3 – Positive Engagement Scale

Variable	N	Missing	Mean	Std. Deviation	Min.	Max.
I strive to communicate a clear and positive vision of the future	301	13	4,41	0,500	3	5
I encourage my team members to have bold dreams in this organisation	301	13	4,35	0,601	3	5
Even when others get discouraged, I know I can find a way to solve the problem	301	13	4,31	0,605	2	5
I am passionate about bringing in positive change around me	301	13	4,39	0,546	2	5
I try to provide hope and courage for people around me to take positive action	301	13	4,41	0,532	3	5
I work with my colleagues to create a shared common vision for positive change	300	14	4,38	0,580	3	5
If I want to change something positively at work, I take an action and initiate the change process	301	13	4,37	0,611	3	5
I am open-minded about new ideas to create change and innovation in the organisation	301	13	4,44	0,530	3	5
I am hopeful about what we can accomplish in this organisation	301	13	4,39	0,564	2	5
I have a fundamental belief in our abilities to produce positive results in this organisation	300	14	4,43	0,594	1	5

### Community Responsiveness Scale

Table 4 captures data in respect of the Community Responsiveness Scale. The overall mean of this scale was 4.21 ( $SD=0.501$ ). As evident, all the variables, on this scale had means that were above 4, which suggests a strong commitment to the community and society amongst leaders in the current sample. The overall mean of this scale in Karakas' (2009: 85), study, was 3.99 ( $SD=0, 59$ ), which suggests that leaders in his sample were also socially responsive.

The highest mean among the variables, on this scale in the present study was 4.38 ( $SD=0.558$ ) for the item, "*I care about the legacy I will leave for future generations*". The second highest mean (4.34;  $SD=0.53$ ) was for the variable, "*I evaluate the consequences of my managerial decisions for all our stakeholders*". The item "*In my work, I strive to help others*" had the highest mean (4.16;  $SD=0.636$ ) in Karakas' (2009: 85) study, whilst the item "*I am willing to devote time and energy to things that are important to my community*", had the second highest mean (4.06;  $SD=7.33$ ) in his study. Whilst these two variables did not have the highest means in the present study, the mean ratings for both these items were above 4, which also suggests a strong commitment to community stakeholders, and a willingness to devote time and energy to the community in the hope of leaving a legacy for future generations.

The lowest mean was for the item "*I am actively involved in social responsibility projects for community benefit*" (4.02;  $SD=0.88$ ), in the current study. Although it was the lowest on the scale, it was still over 4, which reflects a commitment to social responsibility projects.

Drawing upon various perspectives, Tastan and Davoudi (2019: 279) defined *socially responsible leadership* as "a multilevel phenomenon involving individuals, groups and organisations that emphasises leadership effectiveness, ethical behaviour, respect for stakeholders and economically, socially and environmentally sustainable practices". Gleason (2012: 11) similarly described socially responsible leadership as "consciousness of self, congruence, commitment, collaboration, and common purpose, controversy with civility, citizenship and change". Socially responsible leadership, therefore, includes the social-relational processes of individual managers and collectivises that actively to involve stakeholders so that they function as an ethical and socially responsible organisation (Doh, Stumpf and Tymon 2011: 86). These definitions suggest the interconnectedness between ethical leadership and social responsibility.

Responsible leadership is founded on the basis that corporate leaders have a responsibility to a broader range of stakeholders such as non-governmental organisations,

employees and customers, governments, societies, and future generations, all of whom are affected by the organisations' activities (Maak and Pless 2006: 101-102). It was significant then that the second highest mean on the Community Responsiveness Scale was linked to leaders' consideration of managerial decisions for all stakeholders. Responsible leadership has therefore been described as the ability to build and maintain morally sound relationships that are based on a sense of justice, recognition, care, and responsibility for a wide range of economic, social, political, and human tasks (Maak and Pless 2009: 539). The Community Responsiveness Scale makes strong reference to engagement with the community, charitable causes, social responsibility projects, and contribution to the global world and reflects that this is a significant aspect of benevolent leadership.

Table 4 – Community Responsiveness Scale

Variable	N	Missing	Mean	Std. Deviation	Min.	Max.
In my work, I strive to help other people in my organisation and in my community	294	20	4,31	0,620	1	5
Care for my community drives my leadership at work	294	20	4,15	0,693	2	5
The work I do makes a difference in people's lives around me	294	20	4,27	0,570	2	5
I care about the legacy I will leave for future generations	294	20	4,38	0,558	3	5
I feel and act like a responsible leader in my community	294	20	4,17	0,654	2	5
I go beyond my job definition to contribute to my community and to the world	294	20	4,09	0,731	2	5
I am willing to devote time and energy to things that are important to my community	294	20	4,20	0,639	2	5
I am actively involved in social responsibility projects for community benefit	293	21	4,02	0,881	1	5
I evaluate the consequences of my managerial decisions for all our stakeholders	293	21	4,34	0,535	3	5
I give my time and money to charitable causes in my community	294	20	4,22	0,728	1	5

Doh and Stumph (2005: 86) argued that responsible leadership integrates three components, namely: *values-based leadership*, *ethical decision making*, and *quality stakeholder relationships*, suggests that care for community is driven by positive values and a strong ethical background. This supports Karakas' (2009: 47) argument that the various aspects of leadership, are embedded within each of the other scales, namely Spiritual Depth and Ethical Sensitivity and are all interrelated with each other. It further supports the notion that in order to be responsive to the community, one has to have a strong spiritual and ethical leadership framework. Collectively these different dimensions make up benevolent leadership are reflective of the sample.

This was evident in one example of a CEO and an organisation that strives to serve all stakeholders from a humanistic ethical system and that reflects The Spiritual Leadership Triple Bottom Line Business model. Poleman, who is the CEO of Unilever, considers environmental risks and poverty as major problems for almost every part of business operations, from manufacturing laundry detergents to growing tea. The organisation has been successful as Poleman's leadership philosophy is based on the view that the real purpose of business is to come up with solutions that are relevant to society and that will help make society better. Leadership that emphasises sustainability is focussed on leaders who live their lives and lead their organisations in ways that account for their impact on the earth, society, and health of local and global economies.

Managerial values and attitudes towards corporate social responsibility in a particular institutional context are therefore likely to have a strong influence on the outcomes of corporate social responsibility initiatives (Kim and Thapa 2018; de Roeck and Farooq 2018). A study done by Ashmos and Duchon (2000: 143) found a significant relationship between two items used in their scale, viz. "*I see a connection between my work and the larger social good of my community*" and "*the work I do is connected to what I think is important in life.*"

### Perceived Organisational Performance

In this section of the survey, a subjective and multidimensional measure of organisational performance was investigated. Respondents were asked to rate key

dimensions of organisational performance on a 5-point Likert-type scale which ranged from 1 (“much worse”), 2 (“worse”), 3 (“equal”), and 4 (“better”), and 5 (“much better”). The data captured in the Perceived Organisational Performance Scale, is presented in Table 5.

Table 5 – Perceived Organisational Performance Scale

Variable	N	Missing	Mean	Std. Deviation	Min.	Max.
Financial performance indicators, i.e. profitability	288	26	4,20	0,776	2	5
Managerial effectiveness in this organisation	289	25	4,13	0,864	1	5
Ability to attract and retain essential employees	289	25	4,10	0,842	1	5
Satisfaction of customers or clients	289	25	4,21	0,838	1	5
Relations between management and other employees	288	26	4,13	0,785	1	5
Relations among employees in general	288	26	4,17	0,779	1	5
Employee morale	288	26	4,14	0,806	1	5
Employee productivity	288	26	4,13	0,900	1	5
Business ethics	288	26	4,28	0,766	1	5
Spirituality at work	288	26	3,98	0,914	1	5
Positive organisational change	288	26	4,16	0,780	1	5
Corporate social responsibility	288	26	4,25	0,786	1	5
Innovation	288	26	4,22	0,829	1	5
Long term organisational health	288	26	4,29	0,785	1	5

The overall mean of this scale was found to be a high of 4.18 ( $SD=0.670$ ). All the items related to *organisational performance* had a mean above 4, except for “*spirituality at work*”. Karakas (2009: 87) reported a slightly lower overall mean of 3.73 ( $SD=0.60$ ) in his study. In general, the mean scores of the variables in this scale, were found to be relatively similar to the variables of those on the four preceding scales, which collectively constitute the BLS (Benevolent Leadership Score).

The highest mean 4.29 ( $SD=0.785$ ) found on this scale was for the item “*long term organisational health*”. High means were also obtained for the variables “*business ethics*” (4.28;  $SD=0.76$ ); “*corporate social responsibility*” (4.25;  $SD=0.78$ ), and “*innovation*” (4.22;  $SD=0.82$ ). The *perceived organisational performance* with regards to these variables supports earlier findings which reflect high mean ratings on the Ethical Sensitivity Scale and Community Responsiveness Scale. They suggest that when leaders exhibit high levels of ethical sensitivity and responsiveness to community and society, then organisational performance is enhanced in these areas.

The high mean ratings above 4 in the areas of *financial performance*, *customer satisfaction*, *good manager-employee relations*, and *overall employee relationships* attest to this. The lowest mean related to the variable “*spirituality at work*” (3.98;  $SD=0.91$ ). This is consistent with earlier findings from the Spiritual Depth Scale, where the variable “*incorporate spirituality into work*” had a much lower mean rating of 3.95 ( $SD=0.92$ ). This was in comparison to other variables on the Spiritual Depth Scale.

Karakas (2009: 86) reported some similar findings in his study. The highest mean on the Organisational Performance Scale in his study was for the item, “*innovation*” (3.99;  $SD=0.79$ ). Innovation was also one of the highest means in the current study. *Business ethics*, which is linked to organisational performance, was found to have the second highest mean in the present study. It has been described as the “ethical reflection of an organization in terms of its behaviours and impacts on its stakeholders. Corporate values related to integrity, accountability, honesty, trust, fairness, responsibility, co-operation, mutuality, professionalism and open communication are the reflections of the business ethics of any organization” (Su, cited in Tastan and Davoudi 2019: 280).

Benevolent leadership then creates the opportunity to enhance psychological health and well-being, as well as emotional stability, and a sense of adequacy (Kara *et al.* 2013: 12-13). The personal values of leaders not only influence their behaviour, but also encourage strong organisational performance. Leaders with strong personal values such as honesty, altruism, and trustworthiness, therefore have impressive leadership outcomes (Saha, Kashav, Cerchione and Singh 2019: 412). Having a leader who displays respect and dignity and acts with integrity and fairness, creates the potential for followers or subordinates to be

happy with the organisation's reward system, promotion opportunities, relationships with colleagues, and working conditions (Tu, Lu and Yu 2017: 240). A South African study by Mitonga-Monga, Flotman and Moerane (2019: 16) found that the work ethics culture bridges and acts as a mediator in the relationship between ethical leadership and job satisfaction. They explained that when employees perceive a positive work ethics culture and high ethical leadership qualities such as honesty, integrity, respect, and trustworthiness, they might demonstrate a higher level of job satisfaction, including organisational effectiveness.

Whilst personal values of leaders influence organisational performance related to ethics, the ethical climate of the organisations is also important. A survey by KPMG (2008: 3) of 5,065 employees at US based organisations found that organisations with ethics programmes have a healthy ethics climate with a lower incidence of misconduct and greater effectiveness in detecting and responding to misconduct. Organisations which had a comprehensive ethics and compliance programme were characterised by an environment in which people who felt empowered to do the right thing, doubled from 43% to 90% in comparison to companies without these programmes.

According to Gerpott, Van Quaquebeke, Schlamp and Voelpel (2019: 1064), *organisational citizenship behaviour* refers to "altruistic voluntary activities that organisational members undertake outside of their job requirements and possibly without compensation". These activities can focus on individual organisational members or the entire organisation itself. They reported that employees who score highly on organisation directed behaviour, present with higher attendance at work, protect organisational property, and avoid unnecessary break times. Given that these are morally appropriate workplace behaviours, ethical leadership is one of the main antecedents of such follower behaviour (Kacmar, Bachrach, Harris and Zivnuska 2011: 633).

Organisations under ethical and sustainable leadership are expected to achieve greater external legitimacy and a positive brand image on the basis that their business practices are responsible (Wang, Chen, Yu and Hsiao 2015: 2232). *Innovation* was also found to be a significant variable related to organisational performance both in the present study and in Karakas' (2009: 87) study. Aguinis (2019: 25) noted that innovation serves as a crucial factor in determining organisational success. Innovation leaders have been described as change agents who promote the manifestation of new ideas by ensuring that a supportive climate for creativity prevails and by managing the innovation process (Kremer, Villamor and Aguinis 2019: 65). Kremer, Villamor and Aguinis (2019: 67) outlined some of the best practice recommendations of innovation leaders. Firstly, innovation leaders should encourage employee trust and support, and praise those experts willing to help other employees, as well as facilitate a culture of knowledge sharing. Secondly, the design of teams has important consequences for promoting the voice of members as valuable partners, ensuring team cohesion and valuing the input of new ideas and suggestions. Thirdly, innovation leaders create opportunities for interaction outside the team as they recognise that knowledge exists within broader organisational networks. Hence, interacting with others beyond the team may help develop creative ideas. In so doing, innovation leaders strive to strengthen employees' awareness of others' expertise. Fourthly, signs of support, and acknowledging contributions, promotes the voice of others and knowledge sharing initiatives.

Business ethics and innovation appear to have a strong inter-relationship, not within the present study, but also in the literature. A study by Chen and Hou (2016: 1) discovered that when leaders are perceived to be ethical, the creativity of followers is enhanced. Innovation leaders who display ethical behaviours to support employees, inevitably influence front and line workers to be ethical (Chen and Hou 2016: 5). Furthermore innovation leaders create opportunities for knowledge sharing across different levels in organisations, which enhances organisational performance (Aguinis, Gottfredson and Joo 2012). In larger organisations, particularly with skip level employees, there is a greater need for opportunities for them to interact at various levels and to build trust amongst each other (Kremer, Villamor and Aguinis 2019: 72).

Ethical leaders were found to be more likely to influence employees' organisational citizenship behaviour, more importantly, enhance it (Ko, Ma, Kang, English and Haney 2017: 408). Karakas and Sarigollu (2012: 547) also reported that the vitality and community streams of benevolent leadership positively influenced organisational citizenship behaviour. This was further supported in Ghosh's (2015: 598) study which found that ethical sensitivity, spiritual wisdom, positive engagement, and community responsiveness had influenced organisational citizenship behaviour. A positive relationship between benevolent leadership and team performance was also found in a study by Li *et al.* (2018: 369). Moreover, even within highly turbulent and unknown environments, life-oriented and work-oriented benevolent leadership was found to influence team identification and satisfaction (Lin, Liao and Kuo 2018: 1).

"*Spirituality at work*" had the lowest mean on the Organisational Performance Scale, (3.98;  $SD=0.914$ ). This low mean may be linked to the fact that the collective mean for the Spiritual Depth Scale was also found to be lowest (4.13;  $SD=0.65$ ), in comparison to compared to the other three scales. Despite this, "*spirituality at work*" and "*spiritual leadership*," are linked to greater organisational performance in multiple studies, which makes it important to consider. Rathee and Rajain (2020) believed that introducing spirituality in the workplace would not only benefit employees, but economic outputs using measures such as quality, productivity, and profitability would also increase. Most importantly, their study found that workplace spirituality positively influenced work attitudes like organisational performance, involvement in work and commitment to the same, as well as job satisfaction as a whole.

Other writers have noted that workplace spirituality has had a positive impact on employee work attitudes such as increased job satisfaction (Lee, Lovelace and Manz 2014: 45-46), organisational commitment, and a reduced intention to leave work (Gatling, Kim and Milliman 2016: 473). Researchers also found that workplace spirituality was essential in building an ethical climate in organisations and to promoting a culture of prosocial motivation. A study undertaken by Otaya-Ebede, Shaffakat and Foster (2020: 611) with 51 branches of a British retail organisation, found that workplace spirituality was positively associated with ethical climate, prosocial motivation, and moral judgment. Similar findings were made in South Africa in a study by van der Walt and Steyn (2019: 1) who found that organisations that had spiritual values, or what they regarded as workplace spirituality, had a significant impact on the ethical behaviour of project managers.

Aboobaker and Zakkariya (2020: 1) investigated the relationship between workplace spirituality and meaningful work, sense of community, and alignment with organisational values and employee loyalty with a sample of 308 employees in a private sector in India. They found that employees' experience of workplace spirituality had a salient positive influence on their loyalty toward the organisation. These findings suggest that by enhancing spiritual leadership and spirituality at work, other variables described on the Organisational Performance Scale can be improved.

## CONCLUSION

The study provided rich insights into the nature of benevolent leadership in South Africa. The study found a high level of benevolent characteristics, attitudes and behaviours amongst the participants. In particular there were high levels of ethical sensitivity, spiritual depth, positive engagement and community responsiveness amongst the participants which collectively represented a high level of benevolent leadership. This consequently was found to influence organizational performance amongst benevolent leaders, particularly in the areas of business ethics, corporate social responsibility and innovation, customer satisfaction and employee morale and productivity which suggested the potential of benevolent leadership to influence these variables. Given its potential to influence organizational performance it is crucial that benevolent leadership be included into leadership seminars and workshops as well as within business management curricula at tertiary institutions.

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